

THE LIFE OF MRS. NORTON  
PERKINS

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After the painting by John Mayier

Caroline Eliza S<sup>t</sup> Norton

# THE LIFE OF THE HONOURABLE MRS. NORTON

BY  
JANE GRAY PERKINS

WITH PORTRAITS



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## NOTE

FOR the materials which make the foundation of this biography my thanks are due first to members of Mrs. Norton's own family—her grandson, Lord Grantley, whose permission made it possible for me to use her letters, both those already published and those which appear for the first time in these pages; her granddaughter, the Hon. Carlotta Norton; her niece, Lady Guendolen Ramsden; and Mrs. Sheridan of Frampton Court; whose personal recollections of Mrs. Norton and kind hospitality in letting me see certain scrap-books and MSS. and family pictures have greatly aided me in my work.

I must also thank the directors of the Library in the British Museum for their courtesy in allowing me the privileges of this invaluable collection, at a time when the condition of the building, while undergoing repairs, might have furnished adequate excuse for denying those privileges to the passing stranger certainly, if not to the regular reader.

I wish also to express my obligations to Mr. Murray, who kindly allowed me to use several hitherto unpublished letters from Mrs. Norton to his grandfather written between the years 1834-8.

For the great mass of my material, however, I find it difficult to make any adequate acknowledgment, so rich and so varied is the treasure which English

writers of biography and letters have expended upon the period and personages especially included in this biography.

But I can at least thank those publishers who have been most zealous to provide the supply from which I have obtained the greater number of the letters and an even greater part of the facts on which this book depends. I wish especially to mention in this connection my own publisher (Mr. John Murray of Albemarle Street), Messrs. Longman, Green & Co., Messrs. Macmillan, Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., and Sir Isaac Pitman.

J. G. P.

*August, 1909.*

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## INTRODUCTION

MRS. NORTON is a personage whose reputation as a poetess and a writer stood much higher among our grandmothers than it does to-day. To-day, indeed, the greater part of her writing is so much out of fashion as to be nearly out of print, and she herself is considered less as an author than as a beautiful, unfortunate woman, the target of a great deal of cruel scandal, ill remembered, but never quite forgotten.

Her poetry, perhaps, deserves its fate ; it is, indeed, too intimate a part of herself, too dependent on the passing glamour of her beauty, to be expected to survive her. But her novels deserve another chance ; and on this score more consideration is due to her than has been accorded by her own generation. And the lyric touch, too often wanting in her verses, is never lacking in her life ; her own story, told in her own dramatic words, is her real contribution to the literature of her century. This story, though often told in part, and too often obscured or exaggerated by half-truths or whole scandals, has never yet been fairly or adequately narrated.

And yet it would seem that no survey of English social and literary conditions during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century could be complete

without it. The generous, woman's influence has left too deep a mark, not only on the men and manners, but upon the very laws of her time, to let her be entirely forgotten. She can never be forgotten, if only because the mere tradition of her is so deeply embedded in the literary remains of the nineteenth century.

It is only fair, then, that she should be adequately remembered, not only for her misfortunes, but for the real service she rendered to her own kind, the gallant fight she waged against most cruel conditions—conditions which her own extraordinary experience, her passionate energy of resistance, did much to make impossible, almost inconceivable to-day.

The following pages are an effort to render justice to her; to give her something like her real value among people to whom her name and the poorest part of her fame are already vaguely familiar.



# LIFE OF MRS. NORTON

## CHAPTER I

### BIRTH AND SCHOOLDAYS—GEORGE NORTON

THE subject of this biography was the third child of Tom Sheridan ; and therefore a granddaughter of the great Sheridan by his first wife, the beautiful Miss Linley, whose almost impossible loveliness has been preserved for us to this day by some of the most beautiful paintings of Reynolds and Gainsborough.

Tom Sheridan's wife was a Scotswoman ; her parents were James Callander of Craigforth, afterwards Campbell of Ardkinglass, Argyllshire, and his third wife, the Lady Elizabeth Macdonnell, sister of the Earl of Antrim, an Irish peer.

She had probably met her young husband first in Edinburgh, where he was stationed for some years on the staff of the Earl of Moira, but on their marriage, in November 1805, they came to live in London (Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square), where their elder children were born. The great Sheridan was then at the height of his fortune, having passionately mourned but quickly recovered from the loss of his beautiful first wife, and married again, in 1795, a woman much younger than himself, Miss Esther Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester, by whom he had a second son, Charles, born January 14, 1796. This second connection, however, did not interfere with his

interest in his "grandchicks," as he called Tom's children.

The eldest of these was a boy, named Richard Brinsley, after him. Next came Helen, born 1807, followed by Caroline, the second daughter, born March 22, 1808. This date, at least, seems to me most likely to be the correct one, though there are two others given by family authority: 1809, according to Lord Dufferin in his Life of his mother, Helen Sheridan, and 1810, found in records left by Mrs. Norton's second husband, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell.

The family tradition has it that Mrs. Norton was a queer, dark-looking, little baby, with quantities of black hair. There is a story of her, at three years old, brought in and set up on a table to be shown off to her grandfather, the great Sheridan; sitting there frightened out of her wits, staring at him with enormous black eyes, with her hair half concealing her face, till at last he gave utterance upon her: "Well, that is not a child I would care to meet in a dark wood!"

By that time, however, her family's fortune was somewhat in eclipse. On February 24, 1809, the old Drury Lane Theatre was destroyed by fire, and with it the greater part of her father's income and her grandfather's possessions. And very soon after she was born, Tom Sheridan began to show signs of the fatal disease inherited from his beautiful mother. All the later years of his life were spent in a vain search for health, a winter in Ireland, a year in Malta, till at last, in the autumn of 1813, he was appointed, through the influence of his father's old friend, the Duke of York, to a colonial secretaryship at the Cape of Good Hope, which he accepted in a vain belief that the climate would save, or at least prolong, his life. His wife and eldest daughter, afterwards Lady Dufferin, accompanied him on this mission. The other children, all very little, were left behind in Scotland, at Ard-

kinglass, their mother's old home, in the care of their mother's two unmarried sisters, Georgiana and Fanny, afterwards the wife of Sir James Graham.

It happens, therefore, that many of Mrs. Norton's earliest memories and associations were connected with Scotland, a land which she knew and loved better than either England or Ireland, in spite of the sentimental traditions which bound her, by name at least, to the latter country, and a long life lived largely in the former.

Her first instructor was a Scotsman<sup>1</sup> of the name of Wilson; her first lessons were shared with the young son of Lord Kinnaird, an old friend of both her father and mother, whose place at Glenrossie, all through her little childhood, was like another home.

There is a letter of Mrs. Sheridan's, written to her sisters in Ardkinglass from Madeira, on her way to the Cape with her husband, describing all this little brood of children from whom she was parting so reluctantly and so fruitlessly as it turned out, for the appointment at the Cape had come too late to save Tom Sheridan's life. He rallied at first, indeed, and for a time his friends had hopes for his recovery, but only for a time. He died on September 12, 1816, leaving his wife a widow with seven little children, of whom the youngest, Charles, and probably Frank were born at the Cape.

A letter of Charles Sheridan, senior, always a devoted friend to his half-brother's wife and young family, tells of their return to England in the transport *Albion* in the autumn of 1817. Already he speaks of his sister-in-law in terms of affectionate admiration: "Her life has been a course of unparalleled devotion and attachment to my poor brother."

The young widow set herself at once to the difficult task of gathering her little children together and making a home for herself and them out of the remnant of her husband's fortune. Her father-in-law

<sup>1</sup> Article in Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*, 1831.

had died the preceding summer, deeply in debt ; according to some accounts, in actual want. But his death had done more than his later life, perhaps, to revive the glory of his name. His old friend Frederick Duke of York lost no time in presenting his son's widow with a home in Hampton Court.

The whole west wing of the Court was given up to these private apartments, whose favoured occupants, not necessarily known to one another, were almost always in some sort of relation to the Royal family. The half-public, wholly decorous form of life necessary for people whose home is in a royal palace, subject to royal visits, the luxury of space, the beautiful grounds and gardens, perfectly ordered by a service with which the occupants had nothing to do, were as far removed as anything we can imagine from the genteel poverty which might so easily have been the fate of the young Sheridans. Here for several years the family lived together, and laid the foundations for that close and affectionate companionship so remarkable in their later years. They must have been an unusual group of children, extraordinarily good-looking, with dark hair and glowing colour and splendid eyes, real Irish blue as in the case of Brinsley, the eldest, and Georgie, the youngest daughter, afterwards the beautiful Duchess of Somerset ; or dark as night, like Caroline's. They were all clever, gay-tempered, endowed even in childhood with those social gifts which distinguished them in later years.

To quote again from the article I have already cited :<sup>1</sup>

"They were even in the nursery especially fond of private theatricals, and almost every Saturday and half-holiday was spent in preparing extemporary plays ; tragedies were preferred, Turkish, so that they might wear a turband [*sic*]. Five minutes were allowed to an improvised speech to each actor, and

<sup>1</sup> Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*, 1831.

ten minutes for Caroline to prepare her own essays at dramatic eloquence."

They all sang, they all drew, they were all precocious scribblers—in this last amusement, even in those days, Helen and Caroline usually taking the lead. When only eleven years old the latter received as a present from Lady Westmorland a child's illustrated book—one of a series called the Dandy books, full of the grotesque adventures of the beings so named, to caricature the real London dandies of that time. Instantly the two older girls fell upon it and plagiarised it with sketches and rhymes of their own. The result was "The Dandies' Rout," so precociously effective that a certain bookseller named Marshall was willing to publish it at the moderate reward of fifty gift copies for the authors. Years afterwards, looking over children's picture-books for her own little boy, Mrs. Norton was enchanted to find one left over from this her first literary venture, long out of print. We may be sure the story never lost by her telling of it.

Henrietta Callander, the mother of all these spirited, gifted children, was herself a woman of more than usual beauty and intelligence: the first, generally acknowledged; the second, not so instantly appreciated under the veil of an excessive, shy reserve, a gentle, almost timid manner, an extreme consideration for every one about her, which last quality however did not interfere with a habit of discriminating observation of the people with whom she came in daily contact, their weaknesses, their inconsistencies, their absurdities; and she had the rarer power of turning it all from mere raw material into what one may call literary impressions, which must have been part of the family inheritance for a long time before either she or her more famous daughter thought of turning it into gain.

She published three or four short stories of fashion-

able life (all now out of print), all rather stiff with the style of the late eighteenth century, but none without a certain charm and wit which make them fairly readable to-day. "Carwell," her most ambitious effort, is in quite another vein, and shows real imagination in peopling the dark courts and side-alleys of the author's own familiar Westminster with secret lives and hazards; and a real knowledge and sympathy with the sufferings and conditions of the poor.

Her daughter Caroline thus perpetuates the childish impression she retained of this mother:

"In thy black weeds, and coif of widow's woe ;  
Thy dark expressive eyes all dim and clouded  
By that deep wretchedness the lonely know ;  
Stifling thy grief, to hear some weary task  
Conned by unwilling lips, with listless air,  
Hoarding thy means, lest future need might ask  
More than the widow's pittance then could spare.  
Hidden, forgotten by the great and gay,  
Enduring sorrow, not by fits and starts,  
But the long self-denial, day by day,  
Alone amidst thy brood of careless hearts !  
Striving to guide, to teach, or to restrain  
The young rebellious spirits crowding round,  
Who saw not, knew not, felt not for thy pain,  
And could not comfort—yet had power to wound !"<sup>1</sup>

There is a delightful picture of her in the possession of one of her descendants, in coloured crayons, with bunches of soft dark hair, slightly covered by the most graceful of lace caps tied under her chin, the head charmingly tilted, so that the dark eyes look down from the wall at one a little sideways; full, firm lips slightly smiling, a face not less sweet because so full of delicate intelligence.

But indeed she had need of this and all the other qualities Heaven had given her to carry out the task with which she found herself burdened while still a very young woman, at her husband's death; the task

<sup>1</sup> *The Dream*, published in 1840.

of bringing up and educating seven little children, four boys and three girls, on very small resources, of finding professions for her sons and marrying her daughters. One son she lost, while he was still a midshipman in the Royal Navy ; but the other three grew up, and places were found for all of them in the public service, through the Sheridan or quite as often through her own family influence. Her three daughters she brought out one after another into the best London society and married, portionless as they were, to men of family and title, the youngest brilliantly.

Caroline was the only one of these daughters who was sent away from home for part of her education, to a little school between Shalford and Wonersh, in Surrey.

"One thing I remember that mamma said to Caroline when she went to school," writes Georgiana Sheridan, some years later to her elder brother in India, "'Ah, when once the branches of a family are divided, they seldom are all united again.' And it was quite true ; we never did see a Christmas all together again. Caroline went to school, you to Harford ; you never all of you had holidays at the same time. And then poor little Tommy went to sea, and so, though I sincerely hope to see you again, my dear Brinny, yet I never can forget at Christmas or at any other time when we used to be so merry together, that saying of mamma's, and that we never can all meet together again, and I hate the look of the nursery where there used to be so many merry faces and cheerful voices."

It was, perhaps, not so much for education, as for a certain need of discipline, that Caroline was sent away from the little circle at home. For it is evident that the flame of the Sheridan genius had begun to burn hotly in her very early, exciting her to wild rebellion, passionate reactions of feeling, which her grave Scottish mother could understand as little as she could manage them. Yet she was already a person of

more than schoolgirl attainments ; she wrote songs with admirable facility, and sang them to her own music in a young untrained voice, already a soft contralto ; she drew very well, and besides her own and her sister's venture of "The Dandies' Rout," she had also tried her wings in more extended flights, a long love poem in Spenserian stanza, "Amouïvada and Sebastian," begun and never finished, whose scene is laid in America, an early instance of that constant interest and liking for persons and things beyond the Atlantic which we find in her to the end of her life.

She was even then burning to become some day very famous by her writings ; as a little girl this desire had been awakened in her by the sight of her uncle, Mr. Charles Sheridan, at work in his study over a collection of Romaic songs, which he was translating from the original, and which were afterwards published by Longmans. "I invariably left his study," says she, in a letter to an intimate friend, "with an enthusiastic determination to write a long poem of my own."

It was of this, her first long poem, that she was already dreaming when she went to school at Wonersh. It was the Surrey landscape and the little cottages round Guildford that were to make its local colour, as far as it can be said to have any of that very modern quality ; and the turnpike gate on the road from Guildford to Shalford was the scene of its inspiration. But there were other things beside poetry to distract her mind from school books during her stay in Wonersh.

The most important estate in this particular part of Surrey, at that time, was Wonersh Park, the property of Fletcher, third Lord Grantley, a peerage no older than the middle of the preceding century, when it had been bestowed on a certain Fletcher Norton for his services as Speaker of the House of Commons (1769-82). But the family—of Yorkshire originally, and still holding in Yorkshire its principal estates—boasted an antiquity far superior to the title extending

back beyond the Wars of the Roses ; Wordsworth's poem, "The Last of the Nortons," being claimed by them as a tradition of their own race.

Fletcher, the holder of the title when Caroline Sheridan first came to Wonersh, had been for some time married to the beautiful daughter of the painter, Sir William Beechey, but there were no children, and, though Lord and Lady Grantley were both still young, there was little likelihood of there ever being any, so estranged were the relations of husband and wife. There was no open breach between them, however ; when she was not amusing herself at Brighton she was at Wonersh, surrounded by various members of her husband's family—his Scottish mother, his unmarried sisters, his brother George, who was by this time very generally looked upon as his heir.

It was a pleasant old place, not very large, but stately and dignified, the main part an old Elizabethan manor house, the two wings added by the first and third Lords Grantley respectively. The great brick wall which still encloses the place on its side next the village was also the work of Fletcher, the third lord, and in those days just completed, in all the bare ugliness of crude masonry. Its great double Gothic gates, kept always closed during the life of its builder, gave directly upon the small gravelled court in which the old house stood. The real façade of the building, however, looked the other way, towards green lawns studded with beautiful trees, a great cedar, an old sun-dial in the midst of garden-beds full of flowers, and a pretty stream, a branch of the Wey, winding off into the distance.

Mrs. Norton thus describes her first meetings with the man who was afterwards to become her husband.

"He was the brother of Lord Grantley, and the governess to whose care I was confided happening to be the sister to Lord Grantley's agent, the female members of the Norton family, from courtesy to this

lady, invited her and such of her pupils as she chose to accompany her, to Lord Grantley's house. A sister of Mr. Norton's, an eccentric person who affected masculine habits and played a little on the violin, amused herself with my early verses and my love of music, and took more notice of me than of my companions. The occasions on which I saw this lady were not frequent; and still more rare were those on which I had also seen her brother; it was therefore with a feeling of mere astonishment, that I received from my governess the intelligence that she thought it right to refuse me the indulgence of accompanying her again to Lord Grantley's till she had heard from my mother; as Mr. Norton had professed his intention of asking me in marriage."<sup>1</sup>

The gentleman in question was at that time a briefless barrister of about twenty-five, well-made, though not tall, good-looking, with a fine ruddy complexion; but rather dull and slow and lazy, and late for everything, till he at last gained the cognomen, not worn so threadbare then as now, of the "late George Norton." He lost no time, however, in proposing to Mrs. Sheridan for her daughter's hand; not with immediate success indeed. But he was encouraged to hope, to wait, till the young lady was a little older. He did wait, therefore, nearly three years.

<sup>1</sup> "English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century," published 1854.

## CHAPTER II

### MARRIAGE

MRS. SHERIDAN took a house in Great George Street, Westminster, as soon as her eldest daughter arrived at marriageable age, and for some time to come it was in town rather than at Hampton Court that she spent the greater part of the year. Helen Sheridan, the first of those three beautiful sisters to be introduced into society, while still a girl of seventeen, in her first season, captivated the heart of Price Blackwood, a young officer in the Royal Navy. It was not a brilliant match. The young man's father, indeed, was heir to the Irish peerage of Dufferin, but he himself had nothing but his own very slender pay, and his family were all opposed to the connection.

He was too much in love, however, to be influenced by their opposition when once he had overcome the lady's indifference. He married Helen Sheridan at the end of her first London season and carried her off to Italy to escape the unpleasantness which might arise during his family's first annoyance at his disregard of their wishes. And now it was Caroline's turn to be introduced into the world.

As handsome as, though perhaps less graceful than her older sister, she was more remarkable, especially to old family friends, for her resemblance to her

famous grandfather. Moore speaks of it at once in his Diary, May 17, 1826 :

"I had heard that the Fancy Quadrille of the Twelve Months that was danced at the Spitalfields ball last week was to be repeated to-night at Almack's ; but the sister of one of the Months has died since then, and it is given up. The Quadrille of Paysannes Provençales, however, was danced ; some pretty girls—among them a daughter of Lord Talbot—the Miss Duncombes, Mrs. Sheridan's second daughter, strikingly like old Brinsley, yet very pretty."

He called at Mrs. Sheridan's soon after this first encounter, though the sky was pouring torrents, and sang for and with Miss Sheridan, who looked quite as pretty by day. He saw her later at Almack's, where she and eleven others, prettiest of the season's débutantes, took part in the belated dance of the Months, each bearing on her head a gilt basket of the flowers and fruits of her season. And here, too, he declares Miss Sheridan, who was August, to have been the handsomest of them all.

And yet her beauty was not of the sort which is at its best in a very young girl. She was shy—not the shyness of the timid and shrinking nature, but what she herself later describes as—

"*sauvagerie*, a feeling of not being able to amalgamate with other and new associates, because of something in one's mind different from, and superior to, the common nature, which, though one feels, one is afraid of showing ; perhaps from being instinctively conscious that it is an assertion of superiority (and consequently an insult offered to the new acquaintance) ; perhaps from that dread of sympathy which makes one's soul so often creep back like a snail into its shell, from the approach of unknown substances which may wound. The evidence of this shyness of spirit wears off, and it is better that it should, as it is better the feet should be hardened for walking."—Letter to Mrs. Shelley, Fitzgerald's "Lives of the Sheridans."

Its existence, however, must have given uncertainty to a naturally impulsive manner, to her first inclination to say everything and do everything that came into her head. It is not likely that her first London season was a time of unmixed pleasure or unmixed success for her, especially as it was probably cut short by her first real sorrow, the news of her brother's death on his ship in the harbour of Rio de Janeiro. There is a rumour too that there was some one whom she cared for more than for George Norton, some one who died or rode away, whose passing made all other men for the moment indifferent to her.

George Norton did not belong to the same set of London society as she did. But his position in the world was rather improved by his being elected Member of Parliament for Guildford after the dissolution of 1826. And whatever else happened or did not happen, he had remained faithful, or apparently faithful, to his long-declared intention of making her his wife. So at the end of her second season, with another sister coming on after her, having learned by this time that the world was not entirely made for girls like herself—girls who had neither great family nor great position to make up for their lack of dower—in a mood of momentary disgust at what the world had hitherto given her, or submission to her obvious duty to her family, touched and misled no doubt by the permanence of the passion she seemed to have excited in this one lover, she married George Norton, July 30, 1827, he being at that time twenty-six, and she nineteen.

A long letter from Helen Blackwood written as soon as she heard of her sister's engagement helped to strengthen the younger girl's resolution in such a step. Mrs. Blackwood had been quite as little in love with her own husband when she married him as Caroline was with George Norton. She had found herself, however, exceedingly happy with him and with the little son who had been born to them in Italy.



She was sure Caroline would be happy too in following her example.

Perhaps in any ordinary case she would have been right, but certainly no two people were less fitted for each other for all time than Caroline Sheridan and George Norton. Indeed, it seemed as if all the differences of two opposing races and temperaments, the inherent misunderstanding of the Celt and the Saxon, lay between them, and held them apart from any real union. She, gifted, impetuous, stormy-tempered, with a reckless, specious tongue, with an instinct for taking the lead and getting possession of everything around her: magnanimous and generous, incapable of hoarding injuries and paying back old scores when once the first ungovernable outburst of resentment against them had subsided; and he—that dangerous mixture which is often found in dull natures, weak but excessively obstinate and suspicious when he thought he was being led, narrow-spirited, intolerant, slow-witted, yet not silent; rather with a certain power of nagging comment for everything about him that he was least able to understand; not without surface kindness and humanity, fond of children and animals, but coarse-natured and self-indulgent, with a capacity for cruelty and brutality and slow revenge, when once convinced he had been aggrieved, so unlike any quality possessed by his wife that it seemed to confuse and stun her like a blow when she found herself opposed to it. Indeed, it actually did at times take the form of a blow.

She did not love him, she had never loved him, and in the past she had made him feel it; to her own cost now, for he was the sort of man who required a woman to pay in kind for any small humiliation she might have inflicted on him before she became legally bound to him. One hardly likes to think of her despair during the first months of this most unhappy marriage. They were very poor; he had little beyond his expectations and a small appointment on a Commission of Bankruptcy, obtained for him by his

prospective mother-in-law during his period of waiting. His wife had brought him little more—about £50 a year, her share of the pension which had descended on her father's death to his widow and children. So it was perhaps more by necessity than choice that they came back to London after their honeymoon, and spent a short time in chambers in Garden Court, the Temple, which Norton had occupied as a bachelor, with only the old woman who had always taken care of him there to look after them. It was only for a few days, before they could go on to Scotland, where he was expected by his Scottish relatives during the shooting, but it was long enough to give the young wife her first experience of brutal violence from the man with whom she had just promised to spend the rest of her life; violence perhaps easier to forgive after the old woman's explanation that her master was not sober and would regret it by-and-by, but no easier to bear because the ~~custom~~ and spirit of the time offered no hope of any future escape from it.

In those days a woman took her husband for better and for worse, and no amount of ill-treatment or infidelity on his part could free her from her vow to honour and obey him till death. So Caroline Norton, when she found herself tied for life to a man so different from the one she thought she had married, might sob and storm and wish that she was dead, and then find what comfort she could in looking about and seeing that many other women were as badly off as she was, or even worse. She might find what comfort she could in letters to her mother, full of—we may guess what—passionate appeals for sympathy and advice.

On one occasion when she was writing such a letter, with Mr. Norton sitting by, sipping spirits and water while he smoked his cigar, the latter interrupted her by declaring that he knew from the expression of her face she was complaining. She replied with temper

that she could seldom do anything else. Upon which he snatched away and tore up her letter, forbidding her to write at all, but she had not the nature which makes a patient Griselda. She took another sheet and began another letter. So far the affair had proceeded like many another silly wrangle between two young people who have not yet learned, as the phrase goes, to "get on with one another." It is only in the conclusion that we see that streak of cruelty which made this marriage such a peculiarly unhappy one. After watching and smoking a few moments he rose, took one of the allumettes she had placed for his cigar, lit it, poured some of the spirit which stood by him over her writing materials, and in a moment set the whole in a blaze. It was by such means as this, he told her, that he hoped to teach her not to brave him.

The visit to Scotland was one George Norton was accustomed to make every year to the shooting box of Sir Neil Menzies, the husband of his eldest sister Grace. This lady was a hard-tempered Scots-woman, already prejudiced against her brother's marriage for its lack of the worldly advantage she wished to have fallen to his share. The relations between the two sisters-in-law were uncordial from the first. The visit would have been unpleasant enough for the young wife even if she had been safe in her husband's protection instead of being, as she was, nightly in such dread of violence that it drove her more than once to watch for the whole night in another room rather than submit herself to a chance of its recurrence.

But there was a power of recovery in her temper which saved her from the worst effects such treatment may have on the spirit; an endless capacity for throwing off the burden of a sorrow after it had been borne for a certain period, which gave some of the memories even of this most wretched time a certain sweetness. She loved Scotland, revisited for the first time after long absence, "the blue lake and purple hills, . . . the

aromatic scent which loads the atmosphere in spots thickly planted with firs, . . . the bloom of the heather, spread out for miles and miles, the rush of the tumbling, turbid stream, whose banks were blocks of stone, whose shining pools seemed fathomless." She liked her brother-in-law, Sir Neil Menzies, and he liked her. In fact his general inclination for her society, their long walks together on the shores of Loch Rannoch, his pleasure in her passionate admiration for the glow and the fading of the sunset on the Highland hills, and "the lake that lay like a sapphire dropped from the crown of some monarch mountain," his constant friendliness, in short, to his wife's new sister-in-law, was perhaps not the smallest item in Lady Menzies's list of grievances against her.

Mrs. Norton liked coming back to London and settling down in a house of her own, that little house at Storey's Gate of which we hear so often and in such familiar detail that we can almost reconstruct it for ourselves, although it has been swept away in the march of modern improvement. We can imagine its tiny balcony overhanging Birdcage Walk, full of her favourite flowers, from which she used to wave a greeting to her friends as they streamed by in their carriages on their way home from the Derby, or to Lord Melbourne as he strolled across the Park from his office in Downing Street to the glass doorway which gave access to the house on that side. The drawing-room, so small that it was nearly filled by its big sofa : and the window opposite the sofa, with white muslin curtains drawn across it and falling down on one side ; and the litter of coloured chalks and drawing paper and writing materials, which made the whole interior so unlike the conventional lady's reception room of that day.

Here at least her own family were again within her reach, her mother and her lovely younger sister Georgie, and two little brothers, Frank and Charlie, just across the way in Great George Street, and Helen

Blackwood and her husband and baby home again from Italy, in temporary quarters near Hampton Court.

And very soon, no doubt, she was able to manage her husband, when she chose, and when her own stormy temper did not sweep her into direct defiance of him. For in those days, in his own way perhaps, but as well as his faulty nature allowed, he still loved her, and in spite of their differences of temperament, in spite of the vast mental and moral superiority which she must already have felt more and more in all her relations with him, still she was so kind, so warm-hearted and affectionate, that any love of his must at last have roused a certain return in her. Not for some time, however. For some time, indeed, the only use she seemed to make of her growing power over him was to go her own way regardless of his wishes and prejudices.

One great and fundamental difference of opinion between them lay in politics. All the Nortons were Tories; but Caroline, in taking the Norton name, remained openly a Sheridan, devoted to all the Sheridan traditions of belief, a valuable aide-de-camp of those great Whig ladies, the Countess of Jersey, the Countess of Sefton, Lady Cowper—afterwards Lady Palmerston—who were doing such valuable service to their party by making their social prestige a card for winning over susceptible young gentlemen of old Tory families to the Whig cause.

Catholic Emancipation, the subject of the hour as long as George Norton remained in Parliament, had been one of the things for which the older Sheridan had sacrificed himself. Catholic Emancipation was the bugbear of all good Tories, who never forgave their party's betrayal on that point, during the session of 1829, by their own leaders. But through all his course in Parliament, George Norton must have had the discomfort of hearing his wife's enthusiastic championship of that and almost every subject against which he had already cast his vote.

He was also, in those days at least, exceedingly jealous of her. Yet he had to submit to seeing the number and consequence of her admirers increased rather than diminished by her marriage with him.

There was the Duke of Devonshire, for instance, that splendid luminary of the Whig party, just home from a special mission to St. Petersburg, a bachelor, young, good-looking, a connoisseur of all beautiful things, and especially beautiful women, with only one drawback to his social attractions, the fact that he was unfortunately very deaf. The Duke of Devonshire no sooner met Mrs. Norton than he began to distinguish her by his attentions—attentions, indeed, not always entirely agreeable to other members of his family.

To quote from the diary of his sister, Lady Granville, September 16, 1828 :

"I hear Mrs. Norton is to be at Chatsworth [the Duke of Devonshire's famous place in Derbyshire]. I am sorry that we are to have an original among us, somebody impossible to like and ungracious to dislike. I am happy to think that Craddock and Walewski are to be with us; a great relief to the sober part of the community to have such game for her to point at."

And another time a little later :

"The idea of being at Chatsworth with dearest Hart is transport mixed with awe and timidity. Norton will ask me who I am, and suppose I cannot love. I mean to form an alliance with Lord Cowper, whose liveliness will not overpower me!"

But Lady Granville, quite apart from her sisterly affection and her anxiety for her "dearest Hart," was also a mother with marriageable daughters, and as such had her own prejudices against all three Sheridan sisters, and the extraordinary power they seemed to possess for making young marriageable men forget

themselves and their own more obvious advantage, and rush into mad marriages with girls who had not a shilling. She speaks of them all rather flippantly, without their prefixes, "Norton," "Blackwood," "Sheridan," and seldom loses the opportunity of a sly poke or tweak when she has occasion to mention them. In one of her trips across the Channel during the same year we find her saying : "Leopold and suite are going with us. He is going to Berlin; I shall be a very pleasant companion for him, able to talk mild Liberal politics, or of Mrs. Norton's charms, as he likes best." For Leopold, not yet but soon to be elected King of the Belgians, was another of those personages who were turning their eyes with distinguishing admiration on Mr. Norton's wife.



MRS. NORTON.

From a lithograph at Chatsworth.



## CHAPTER III

“THE SORROWS OF ROSALIE”—“THE UNDYING ONE”—  
“SOCIAL SUCCESSES”

THOUGH George Norton had shown himself so far capable of generous feeling as to be ready to marry the woman he loved, regardless of her lack of fortune, he was by no means indifferent to the inconveniences resulting from this very cause. Many of the quarrels which embittered their marriage arose from his mean reminders that she had brought him nothing but her person, and was therefore bound to give more and expect less than a wife with a better dower. It was the sting of necessity, therefore, quite as much as her old desire for fame, which drew her again to look for a market among the publishers for her poetry. She was so far successful that “The Sorrows of Rosalie, a Tale, with other Poems,” appeared anonymously in the spring of 1829, and sold so well that with the proceeds she was able to pay all the expenses of her first confinement.

The little book’s authorship was only a nominal secret. The dedication to Lord Holland is a frank enough tribute from Sheridan’s granddaughter :

“Taught in the dawning of life’s joyous years  
To love, admire, and reverence thy name,  
Though of youth’s feelings few remain the same,  
And the dim vista of its hopes and fears  
Memory hath blotted out, with silent tears—

Still in its brightness, even as then it came,  
Linked with the half-remembered tales of fame ;  
That word before my darkened soul appears,  
Bringing back lips that speak and smile no more ;  
Spurn not my offering, then, from that bright shrine  
Where hope would place it, but for those of yore  
Permit her name, who trembles o'er each line,  
In its oblivion to be shadowed o'er  
By the bright, happy gloriousness of—Thine."

It is unnecessary to comment seriously upon the contents of this little volume. For whatever may be said of the mental quality which drove this girl of nineteen to a constant effort towards literary creation, it would have been little short of a miracle to have found real poetry springing so soon out of the mass of false relations, false sentiment and extravagant, often artificial feeling, which was the conventional inheritance of every well-brought-up woman in the early nineteenth century, with little to counteract it in the education, at once meagre and sophisticated, which had been especially devised for girls of her class and expectations. Add to this the peculiar narrowness which great beauty gives to the range of a woman's experience when she does come into relation with the better educated half of mankind, the lack of proportion that is so apt to accompany great personal unhappiness in the very young, and we are prepared for exactly what we find in these first verses of Mrs. Norton's. The Tale itself is the long poem of her girlish ambition, very long indeed, nearly two hundred Byronic stanzas, devoted to the favourite theme for pathetic writing at that day, and, indeed, for many days to come—the seduction and desertion of a young and beautiful girl by a high-born lover, her subsequent misfortunes and death. And the shorter pieces are melancholy, egotistical effusions, stilted in their expression, and varying only from sad to bitter in their endless iteration of the disillusionment which had followed their author's first real experience of life.

I need only quote one of these earliest poems to give a fair idea of them all :

" My heart is like a withered nut,  
Rattling within its hollow shell ;  
You cannot ope my breast and put  
Anything fresh with it to dwell.  
The hopes and dreams that filled it when  
Life's spring of glory met my view,  
Are gone, and ne'er with joy or pain  
That shrunken heart shall swell anew.

" My heart is like a withered nut ;  
Once it was soft to every touch,  
But now 'tis stern and closely shut :  
I would not have to plead with such.  
Each light-toned voice one cleared my brow,  
Each gentle breeze once shook the tree  
Where hung the sun-lit fruit, which now  
Lies cold and stiff and sad like me.

" My heart is like a withered nut—  
It once was comely to the view ;  
But since misfortune's blast hath cut,  
It hath a dark and mournful hue.  
The freshness of its verdant youth  
Nought to that fruit can now restore ;  
And my poor heart I feel in truth,  
Nor sun nor smile shall light it more."

In July 1829 her first child, Spencer, was born, a frail and delicate baby, whose long and serious illnesses early initiated his mother into the anguish as well as the joys of motherhood. The birth, however, of this boy, and the thought of him as the son of his father, did more to tame her and attach her to her husband than all the violence of George Norton's first passion for her. Her new occupation, also, and the addition it brought to their narrow income, added confidence, it might be even tenderness, to her relations with her husband. Almost immediately after her son's birth she was again at work on a new poem, "The Undying One," which, in spite of all her anxieties and distractions as the young mother of a very delicate

baby, was ready for publication at the beginning of the following year, 1830. A little glimpse of how she worked at that time is shown by another letter of Georgiana Sheridan to her brother in India.

“ SUNDAY, January 24, 1830,  
finished February 8.

“ DEAREST BRIN,

“ I am long in giving the promised account of our doings at Claremont [Prince Leopold's residence near Hampton Court], but have not really had time, owing to the illness of poor Caroline's beautiful baby—an account of which you shall have anon. He is well now. . . . Caroline has finished her new poem, called ‘The Undying One.’ She is going to write another poem called ‘The Lady of Ringstatten,’ and she *has* written two volumes of a novel called ‘Love in the World and Love out of the World,’ which I want her to finish, as prose sells better and easier than poetry. She means to ask £500, and thinks six weeks' more hard writing will finish it, and then she intends to write a tragedy.”

Such an output in a few months speaks well for the young writer's industry if for nothing else. But, to quote her own words, she brought to her many tasks “all the energy which youth, high spirits, ambition, good health, and the triumph of usefulness could inspire, joined to a wish for literary fame so eager that I sometimes look back and wonder if I was punished for it by unenviable and additional notoriety.”

As to her desire for literary fame, it is not likely that work produced in this way, and in such quantities, could have much permanent value.

“ The Undying One,” which appeared in the beginning of 1830 under the auspices of a new publisher, Colburn & Bentley, New Burlington Street, is a long, diffuse poem in four cantos, on the threadbare theme of the wandering Jew. Indeed Mrs. Norton herself felt it necessary later to apologise for the choice of a subject so hackneyed by the confession that when she chose it

she was still too unfamiliar with literature to know how hackneyed the subject really was. The book was dedicated to the Duchess of Clarence, one of the many royalties with whom her early residence at Hampton Court had brought her into personal relations. Indeed, not only the Duchess and the Duke, afterwards William IV., but all the young FitzClarences, male and female, were friends of that early period, according as their ages corresponded with one or another of the young Sheridans, and remained in friendly relations with them as long as they all lived.

This time she permitted her name to appear on the first page—"The Undying One and other Poems, by the Honble. Mr. Norton." It was reviewed in *Fraser's Magazine*, a periodical notorious for the violent, personal tone of its reviews. But while every known weakness of her grandfather and father was exhibited to the public in a derisive panegyric of the Sheridan genius, the young writer and her poem came off rather well, better than in the comment of the Tory paper *John Bull* on her assumption of a title to which her husband had then no right. He could be the Hon. George Norton only if he were the son, not, as he was, the brother of a peer; the existing Lord Grantley having inherited from his uncle.

The "other poems" of this new Collection include many of the songs by which the author is best known to us now—no doubt well known then before they appeared in print, for they were her songs, which she sang to her own melodies "in her soft contralto voice"—songs which have since been sung by all the beautiful dead voices of the last two generations, till it is almost impossible to judge them apart from their peculiar associations. And whatever the faults we may find in them when we come to regard them with a coldly critical spirit, they were for a long time excessively popular, and might still give pleasure in their graceful appeal to a frankly romantic and sentimental side of emotion, which, though just now gone rather out of

fashion, can never go entirely out of existence, and may one day come to its own again.

Their very titles wake familiar memories in those who are still possessors of old-fashioned music albums :

“Thy name was once the magic spell  
By which my heart was bound.”

“I dreamt,—’twas but a dream,—thou wert my bride, love !”

“Love not, love not. The thing you love may die.”

“I was not false to thee.”

And last, best known even at the present day : “My Arab Steed.”

It was this same year, 1830, that Mrs. Norton made the acquaintance of Fanny Kemble, then in the first glow of her triumph as an actress at the Covent Garden Theatre, a gifted creature herself, with a power of description which makes peculiarly alive everybody she mentions in that delightful book of hers, “Recollections of a Girlhood.”

We find here an amusing account of a meeting between Mrs. Norton and Theodore Hook, the editor of *The John Bull Review*, whose mischievous comments on her use of her own name had already awakened her indignation against him.

Fanny Kemble did not like Theodore Hook either.

“I always had a dread of his loud voice and blazing red face and staring black eyes, especially as on more than one occasion his after-dinner wit seemed to me fitter for the table he had left than the more refined atmosphere of the drawing-room.”

She goes on to describe his skill in extempore composition, concluding at last :

“But I remember hearing his singular gift in a manner that seemed to me as unjustifiable as it was

disagreeable. I met him once at dinner at Sir John McDonald's, then Adjutant-General, a very kind and excellent friend of mine. Mrs. Norton and Lord Clements, who were among the guests, both came late and after we had gone into the dining-room, where they were received with a discreet quantity of mild chaff, Mrs. Norton being much too formidable an adversary to be challenged lightly. After dinner, however, when the men came up into the drawing-room, Theodore Hook was requested to extemporise, and having sung one song, was about to leave the piano in the midst of the general entreaty that he would not do so, when Mrs. Norton, seating herself close to the instrument, so that he could not leave it, said in her most peculiar, deep, soft contralto voice, which was, like her beautiful dark face, set to music, 'I am going to sit down here, and you shall not come away, for I will keep you in like an iron crow (bar).'

"There was nothing about her manner or look that could suggest anything but a flattering desire to enjoy Hook's remarkable talent in some further specimen of his power of extemporisng, and therefore I suppose there must have been some previous ill-will or heart-burning on his part towards her. She was reckless enough in her wonderful wit and power of saying the most intolerable, stinging things to have left a smart on some occasion in Hook's memory, for which he certainly did his best to repay her then. Every verse of the song he now sang ended with his turning with a bow to her, and the words, 'My charming iron crow'; but it was from beginning to end a covert satire of her and her social triumphs. Even the late arrival to dinner and its supposed causes were duly brought in, still with the same mock-respectful inclination to his 'charming iron crow.' Everybody was glad when the song was over, and applauded it quite as much from a sense of relief as from admiration of its extraordinary cleverness; and Mrs. Norton smilingly thanked Hook, and this time made way for him to leave the piano.

"We lived near each other at this time, we in James Street, Buckingham Gate, and the Nortons at Storey's Gate, at the opposite end of the Birdcage Walk. We

both of us frequented the same place of worship, a tiny chapel wedged in among the buildings at the back of Downing Street, the entrance to which was from the Park ; it has been improved away by the new Government offices. Our dinner at the McDonalds' was on a Saturday, and the next day, as we were walking part of the way home together, Mrs. Norton broke out about Theodore Hook and his odious ill-nature and abominable coarseness, saying that it was a disgrace and a shame that for the sake of his paper, the *John Bull*, and its influence, the Tories should receive such a man in society. I, who, but for her outburst upon the subject, should have carefully avoided mentioning Hook's name, presuming that after his previous evening's performance it could not be very agreeable to Mrs. Norton, now, not knowing very well what to say, but thinking the Sheridan blood (especially in her veins) might have some sympathy with, and find some excuse, for him, suggested the temptation that the possession of such wit must always be, more or less, to the abuse of it.

"‘Witty !’ exclaimed the indignant beauty, with her lip and nostril quivering—‘witty ! One may well be witty when one fears neither God nor the devil.’”

A letter of Fanny Kemble’s written to Mrs. Jameson, very nearly at the time when this event took place, gives perhaps a better idea of her impressions of Mrs. Norton than these later reminiscences :

“ GLASGOW, July 3, 1830.

“ What you say of Mrs. Norton only echoes my own thoughts of her. She is a splendid creature, nobly endowed every way—too nobly to become through mere frivolity and foolish vanity, the mark of the malice and envy of such *things* as she is surrounded by, and who will all eagerly embrace the opportunity of slandering one so immeasurably their superior in every respect. I do not know much of her, but I feel deeply interested in her, not precisely with the interest inspired by loving or even liking, but with that feeling

of admiring solicitude with which one must regard a person so gifted, so tempted, and in such a position as hers. I am glad that lovely sister of hers is married, though matrimony in that world is not always the securest haven for a woman's virtue or happiness ; it is sometimes in that society the reverse of an honourable estate."

The sister referred to is, of course, Georgiana, who was married in June 1830 to the eldest son of the Duke of Somerset, Lord Seymour, instantly acknowledged by his new connection as the dearest, kindest brother-in-law in the world. The house where the young couple proceeded to establish themselves, just across the Park from the Nortons at Storey's Gate, No. 18, Spring Gardens, was always a place of especial resort for the Sheridan brothers and sisters.

On June 26, 1830, the King, George IV., died, and in the general election that followed Lord Seymour came in as a Whig from Devonshire, while George Norton lost his seat as Tory for Guildford.

This abrupt conclusion of his Parliamentary career was a not unimportant link in the chain of events which was to bring such disaster to that unfortunately married couple.

We read in a letter of Mrs. Norton's written to her sister Lady Seymour on this occasion :

"August 5, 1830.

"Norton's election is lost, and with that mixture of sanguine hope, credulity, and vanity which distinguishes him, he assures me that, although thrown out, he was the popular candidate ; that the opponents are hated, and that all those who voted against him did it with tears. I swear to you this is not exaggerated, but what he says and believes. He is just gone down to Wonersh to do the honours of a *fête champêtre* given in his name and Grantley's at that place. I am sorry, not because I ever hoped to see him an orator, but because, after all, it is something lost—one of the opportunities

of life slipped through one's fingers. The most immediate disagreeable consequence of his not coming in for Guildford is that our stay in Scotland is to be extended to the end of October or the beginning of November, and I fear when he is once there, we shall stay the Christmas, as his Parliamentary duties have alone prevented it hitherto. The remote evil is more to be dreaded if it turns out to be feasible. Grantley and he have agreed that to conciliate the goodwill and affection of the Guildford voters it is necessary to be more amongst them than Norton has hitherto been. For this purpose they propose, not that Norton should come to Wonersh at stated intervals—which he has made impossible with any comfort—but that he should live at a little cottage there, called Norbrook, belonging to Lord Grantley. Norton assures me that I am the sort of person to be interested about anything, that I shall easily change my delight in society for pride and pleasure in my dairy, while his health will be materially benefited by the change, and that his *profession* shall still be politics.

"I am provoked beyond my usual style of heroics, and you may think me harsh to him, but this last plan beats all. I have yet, however, these hopes : 1<sup>st</sup>, that the natural selfishness of man may prevent the Commission of 'Bankrupts' from agreeing to Norton's plan for his own exclusive benefit ; 2<sup>nd</sup>, that the unnatural selfishness of his own brother will prevent his getting Norbrook at all, unless upon terms which with our income would be impossible. And this I am resolved, that if Norbrook is not to come into our hands built, furnished, and free of prior expenses I will resist, and that to the uttermost of my power, the headstrong folly which, for the sake of a moderate and most uncertain advantage, would, by plunging Norton into difficulties from which he would never be able to extricate himself, ruin the future prospects, slender as they are, of my little one.

"I shall be very sorry to live in the country, and that too just as you are coming to live in town, and we might have been so much together. I earnestly hope, however, that the plan will not be feasible ; there are many difficulties, and to him, difficulties are too often impossibilities. Of the Wonersh business

I can only tell you that Lady Grantley says I shall never come there again, and will not speak to Norton; and that the day I left town I saw Grantley and young Austen chatting arm-in-arm in Pall Mall.

"I think Grantley hopes that I am fool enough to refuse to live with Norton in the country, and that a separation would leave Norton once more a tool in his hands. Now, dear, he overrates my London feelings amazingly and underrates my wisdom. God bless you, dear. There is a good deal in this letter, considering I never cross, but am only crossed. Love and congratulations to your good man.

"Ever your most affectionate,  
"CAR."

The fate she so dreaded, solitude *à deux* in a quiet little Surrey village, did not ever befall her. We find her writing in her usual spirits to her sister from Brighton later that same year.

"BRIGHTON, December 26.

"'Seule joie de mon âme, charmante et bien-aimée Marietta.'

"Such was the formula with which Jean Sobieski's letters to his wife commenced, and such, from my near vicinity to the Pavilion, is the kingly salutation which rises to my lips, or rather my pen. I return, Madame, on Monday, January 3, 1831, to light up your homes with joy. I have wandered about like an evil spirit, seeking rest, but finding none. I have bathed, and am a little cleaner but none the merrier. I have walked up and down the new walk by the seaside, but the only visible effect is elephantiasis in my left leg and the gout in my right. I have stood looking at the sunset on the sea with Clarence Pigeon at my side, but the results are merely a red nose and hatred of my companion (together with some shame at being seen with him because he wears a tail coat of a morning). I have watched all the geese who walk bare-legged on the Marine Parade 'not for fear of bein' seen, but for dirting their clothes,' and return

to the bivouac at the Weymouths', weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. I call it 'bivouac' because the Captain always begins, 'When I biv-whacked in Spain.' Cordial, kind, excellent, amiable, devoted friends!

"December 27.

"I did not finish yesterday, because I was interrupted. Yesterday I bade Amelia farewell [Lady Amelia Fitz-clarence, about to be married to Lord Falkland], and saw her wedding-dress, which was lace over satin, with a veil to match, very pretty. She was in very high spirits, and looked handsomer than ever. The 'Falkland Isles' was full of poetical forebodings and assurance that *he* would govern. 'It's easy talking when talking's all,' said I. 'Do you think I couldn't?' quoth he in fury. 'By Jove, I'd make any woman do as I pleased, aye, even you, odd as you are, and comfortable as you are, and out of my reach as you think yourself.' 'I am not out of your reach, Lord Falkland,' said I, measuring the distance between us with my small brown eye. 'Well, you need not laugh at me when I'm going away to-morrow.' So I desisted. They were hooked-and-eyed this morning, and are gone to Cumberland Lodge. I gave the creatures my blessing!

"I'm always jealous of people who are going to be married. Black envy and venomous spite!"

The beginning of the new year found her still at Storey's Gate, though the little cottage in Surrey must have loomed a dangerous possibility across her future for some months to come. For the Whig Parliament, elected in the summer of 1830, had lost no time in turning out Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington, and bringing in a new Government headed by Lord Grey, and pledged to economy and Parliamentary reform. And one of the first departments to suffer curtailment under the vigorous reorganisation of Lord Brougham was that in which George Norton served as Commissioner of Bankruptcy.

It was absolutely necessary then to find some new place for him before Lord Brougham should have

reformed away his old one, or to see him dependent upon his brother for the future. The thought of the alternative, no doubt, nerved his wife for the task to which she presently set herself.

Fortunately for her, the new Government was composed largely of friends of her famous grandfather, while the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir James Graham, was her uncle by his marriage with her mother's youngest sister. Her own family had already felt the advantage of this last connection, which brought young Frank Sheridan an appointment among the clerks of the Admiralty and Price Blackwood a frigate. Mr. Norton's profession excluded him from this source of influence; but it would be a pity if no other Cabinet Minister could be found to give him preferment suited to his especial training and talents.

To quote Mrs. Norton's own words :

"I besieged with variously worded letters of importunity the friends whom I knew as the great names linked with the career of my grandfather."

One of these was, of course, the Lord President, Lord Lansdowne; another was Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary. This last-named nobleman was at that time approaching his fiftieth year. It might be supposed, therefore, that he had left the better part of his life behind him. And yet, in fact, he had hardly begun his career. He had held office for the first time only three years before, the year of Caroline's marriage, 1827, when he was appointed Irish Secretary under George Canning. He was called home from Ireland in January 1828 by the death of his wife, the eccentric and unhappy Lady Caroline Lamb. In the same year, on the death of his father, he became Lord Melbourne, and took his seat in the House of Lords. Some time before this event and his appointment to the Home Office, his relations with Lady Brandon had resulted in a civil suit for damages, in which the lady's guilt was as evident as her husband's readiness to make money out of it. The

whole affair was given as little publicity as possible, but it was well known and discussed in London society of that time, to whom it could hardly have come as a surprise, for he had never been a man of impeccable reputation in those respects, though there was a certain grace even in his weaknesses in this direction, arising as they did from a sort of inherent need for women's society and companionship, and capable as they were, sometimes, of a very fine quality of friendship.

Such was the man whom Caroline Norton's letter found in his new office in Downing Street. One regrets that this one letter, the first of the many he was to receive in that same clear, characteristic handwriting, has long ceased to exist, and that we can never know exactly what graceful and persuasive wording brought him to his decision not to write his reply but to go and see the woman whose name stood at the bottom of the page. He stopped at Storey's Gate one afternoon on his way to the Lords; and though it seemed at first that there was little in his power to do for her husband, he often afterwards dropped in to see *her* on his way to and from the House, or after a Cabinet meeting. On these occasions he used to sit on the sofa in the little drawing-room, sometimes highly talkative and amusing, at others in the lazy, listening, silent humour which Greville speaks of as equally characteristic, "disposed to hear everything and say very little."

They soon were intimate friends. The perfect innocence of their relation had at last to be proved, but it *was* proved, in a court of common justice, so convincingly that even those most ready at first to deny it were forced at last to acknowledge how profoundly their worldly wisdom, in this case at least, had been at fault. That it was a friendship without sentiment, however, it is impossible and not necessary to believe. He had all the advantages that would attract a woman of her temperament: good looks,

maturity of experience, knowledge of the world, combined with a rude, handsome manliness, and spirits as high as, and even more boisterous than her own, tempered, like hers, by a vein of thoughtfulness and melancholy—this last, however, as much concealed as it was in the nature of a very open, unaffected man to conceal anything. In his society, too, for the first time she felt an answer to her own mind such as no one in the world had yet vouchsafed. She found a tutor and guide worthy of that eager, hungry intelligence which had never yet received its proper measure of nourishment. He was a man “saturated with information, which was constantly bubbling over in an original and sometimes fantastic form,” yet he heartily despised all the conventions and hypocrisies of those learned men who like to hold the thought of others in leading strings; not indeed a profound or radical thinker himself, he never really went very far afield from the moderate and compromised conclusions of the average British mind; but his method of thought was perfectly untrammelled and audacious, most acceptable to a spirit which had never before been able to stretch to its full height.

And then he had no small meannesses. He cared too little for those rewards and distinctions on which the men about him set such a high price. He held his own high place lightly. He did not conceal his jovial contempt of others who held it dear.

And as for her effect upon him! He was not a man to remain quite cold in his relation to any woman; belonging rather to those who even in old age, even in their treatment of little children, preserve something of the eternal relation, though it may show itself at last only in a gentleness peculiarly flattering—a sentiment of vain regret for the woman whom perhaps he will never live to see. But Caroline Norton was not a child, rather an extraordinarily fascinating woman, of a beauty so rare and noble that it is hard to give it any comparison: with hair black as night and

skin clear olive, without colour, except that she had an unexpected way of blushing a sudden red, which ebbed and flowed, mounting as she spoke and receding as quickly; and eyes which her generation have exhausted themselves in praising: "passionate eyes, whose rarely lifted lashes—black, long, and silky—made them seem so much more soft than they really were."

There is a characteristic bit among Miss Kemble's letters not so often quoted as her other allusions to Mrs. Norton:

"*March 8, 1831.*

"Tuesday I played Belvidera. I was quite nervous acting it again after so long a period. After the play my father and I went to Lord Dacre's and had a pleasant party enough. Mrs. Norton was there, more entertaining and blindingly beautiful than ever. Henry [Miss Kemble's brother] desired me to give her his desperate love, to which she replied by sending the poor youth her deadly scorn. Lord Melbourne desired to be introduced to me. I think if he likes he shall be the decrepit old nobleman you are so afraid of my marrying. I was charmed with his face, voice, and manners. We dine with him next Wednesday, and I will write you word if the impression deepens."

The dinner, however, did not come up to the pretty young actress's expectations. All three Sheridan sisters were there, and the host was so absorbed by Mrs. Norton that the other guests were overshadowed.

## CHAPTER IV

### LITERATURE AND POLITICS

THE year 1831 marks the flood-tide of Caroline Norton's first successes. In this year she was first presented at Court in the Drawing-room held by the new King, William IV., and Queen Adelaide, on April 26, when her splendid beauty made something of a sensation ; and from this time on, her name begins to appear in the fashionable journals which, unless for some good reason, seldom used their space for commoners in their résumés of fashionable doings.

And it was during this same season that she was further gratified by seeing a play of hers staged and acted at the Covent Garden Theatre. *The Gypsy Father*, with the "g" pronounced hard, as one of the reviews of it is careful to tell us, was hardly a brilliant success. But it was repeated several times to a dress circle and private boxes full of fine folk, as Fanny Kemble tells us.

"Tuesday, May 31.

"Lady Seymour and her husband, with Corinne and Mr. Norton, in a box opposite ours. What a terrible piece ! What atrocious situations and ferocious circumstances, tinkering, starving, hanging, like a chapter out of the Newgate Calendar. But, after all, she is in the right—she has given the public what they desire. . . . Of course it made one cry horribly."

A second edition of "The Undying One," with a

short biographical notice of the poem and the author, also appeared in this year in Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*. Fraser's published her likeness in a line-engraving by the clever young Scotsman, Maclise, if anything so really unlike her as the slender being, with downcast eyes and small head poised upon a swanlike neck, drawing water from a tea-urn with fingers delicately crooked could be called a likeness. Another picture of her by the same hand appears a little later in the same periodical, giving her a place among "Regina's Maids of Honour," the female contributors to the paper so-called in those fantastic days. But what she wrote, or how much she wrote for that magazine during her first years of literary apprenticeship, it is impossible to tell, from the habit of the writers for the more serious periodicals of that day of publishing their work unsigned. Her successes were not, however, merely social and literary. At no other period of her life did her husband seem more proud and fond of her than during the year when her influence with the Home Secretary got him a judgeship in the Lambeth Division of the Metropolitan Police Courts, with a salary of £1,000 a year. It was a position which exactly suited his tastes and capacities. For three days a week, between the hours of twelve and five, he had to judge cases brought before him in the Lambeth Police Court. His companions on the Bench were gentlemen, and the office, while requiring no especial talent or knowledge beyond the simplest points of common law, yet conferred a dignity upon the holder, specially gratifying to a man of his temper. He liked it so well, in fact, that he could not persuade himself to part with it, not even when his relations to the man from whom he received it assumed such a character that his retention of it laid him open to the harshest criticism. He only resigned a few years before his death, when his length of service enabled him to retire on a pension.

In the first blush of his improved circumstances,

he set up a cabriolet of his own, and would sometimes stop on his way home from his duty to take his wife to drive. They also entered upon extensive alterations of the house in Storey's Gate, which are described in the following letter of Caroline Norton to her child's nurse, who had been sent off with the baby by the steam-packet to Margate to avoid the confusion at home. I give the letter nearly at length, though it has already been published in the Appendix of the "Maclise Gallery of Portraits," edited by William Bates, because it shows a side of her character often overlooked in the more turbulent manifestations of her genius—a very simple, womanly side, interested in the tiny, daily details of domestic life, attached to her child, full of wifely subservience to her husband.

"KING'S GATE.

"DEAR MRS. MOORE,

"I was very thankful to get news of my darling, and I am thankful he is out of the poisonous smell of paint, which made me so ill I was forced to sleep at Georgie Seymour's one night. There never was such a mess. But we are having the *nursery* done very nicely. We have changed the buff to stone-colour, which makes it less like a garret, and larger and lighter-looking, and I have ordered the white press to have new panes in it where they are broken, and to be grained and varnished as nearly as possible like your drawers, which it stands on. . . . The green windows make the house look so dark that we are going to have the house painted to look like stone, the balcony carried out to the end of Mr. Furnivall's, and two little mock windows to match the storeroom, which will make the house look at least four feet larger in appearance. There are improvements for you! I trust in Heaven my little one will not have caught cold from the rain the night of your arrival, and that you got comfortable lodgings. Tell me in your next letter more about them, whether they face the sea, and whether you have money enough; how Spencer liked the steam-packet, whether he has had any return of the relaxation and sickness, poor lamb! I miss him dreadfully, and am continually forgetting

that he is not in the house, and listening for the little voice on the stairs. Mr. Norton still intends coming on Monday, but as he returns on Wednesday, I think an hotel would be as cheap as lodgings, unless the person you are with could let us have a bedroom and a sitting-room for the two nights, which is hardly worth while. Perhaps Mr. Norton will let me stay a week at Ramsgate ; in that case, if we had a little sitting-room I could sleep with you, if your bed is a good size ; or, if they have a room with a single bed for me, we might eat our meals there and have no sitting-room. Pray, dear old woman, ask about and get something low ; I am sure if it is cheap Mr. Norton will let me stay the week, and I am so poisoned here that if I do not get a mouthful of fresh air my little November baboon will be born with a green face. Try and manage this for me. . . . The King is to sign the Patent for Mr. Norton to be made Honourable on Monday, and then it is to be hoped the *John Bull* paper will be satisfied. Mr. Norton is very glad, and Lord Melbourne has been very kind about it. Lord Melbourne is better, and offered me two tickets for the House of Lords on Thursday to hear the King's Speech. But I must come to my Too-too, who, I hope, will give me a ticket when *he* is Lord Grantley. There, kiss your old mother, and send me a message in your next letter. Here is a little picture for you. God bless you.

“CAROLINE NORTON.”

The picture referred to in the letter is a little sketch of herself in pen-and-ink at the foot of the page. All three sisters were in the habit of thus illustrating their correspondence, and Caroline especially showed therein an admirable talent, as well as a dangerously keen sense of her own and her friends' absurdities.

The next letter is written to her husband in the same summer while she was away on a visit in Wiltshire to her sister, Lady Seymour, and shows better than any mere telling how the birth of one child and the promise of another had softened and tamed her feeling for him :

"MAIDEN BRADLEY, MERE, WILTS,  
"Tuesday, July 12.

"DEAREST GEORGE,

"Our chicken came safe to hand this morning, it having rained torrents nearly all night. He rested at Mere, and came on in the gig Seymour sent, and I have just seen him washed and put to bed in a large, high, airy room; he has been in high spirits all day, playing with the pet lamb and the beagle puppy, the latter of whom shows a decided attachment to his little companion, but the lamb is really so stupid and so awkward that I wish it roasted a dozen times a day. I think and hope Menny has not taken cold, but Mrs. Moore says that when the rain came on very heavy the outside passengers crammed in, and as they were very wet, it is a bad chance for him. I hear Mr. Bush, the doctor, is a very experienced person, with the practice of several parishes in his own hands, so I do not feel so unhappy at being parted from my beloved Herbert. I got a little scrawl from you this morning (which, by the omission of the word *Mere* on the directions, travelled to three or four towns), reproaching me for not writing, whereas I have written every day except last night, when I thought I would wait till the arrival of my dear Lambkin, whose coming gave me great joy. Your letters are too short, sir, and if you do not make them longer, I shall believe you are looking on at the domestic happiness of that amiable young person and her bridegroom, to whom you were charitable enough to pay a visit some time since. Our pony chaise comes home to-morrow, and then, I suppose, I shall see Longleat [the country place of the Marquis of Bath] and tell you something of the country, but there is nothing to tell about close by. I dreamed last night that you were dying, and two old maids told you stories of me, and then persuaded me that you would not see me; but I rushed into your room and found it was all a lie, and that you were dying for my company; and then I thought, as I was sitting by you explaining, I saw you grow quite unconscious and die, wherefore I woke with a flood of tears, and walked up and down with bare feet, till Mrs. Moore arrived and informed me that you were quite well and no old maids with you. I dreamed, the night

before, the baby was drowning, and I saw him floating down the river, but no one would attend to me, because I was mad! Horrid dreams beset me. I cannot bear sleeping alone; hem! You ought to come down and protect me. This morning I broke my already broken tooth quite up into my jaw, and it almost put out my eye with the pain. I drew the fragment myself with much trouble with the pincers in my dressing-case, and was exactly twenty-four minutes at it! Pity my sufferings! I will write every day of myself and the two children.

“Ever yours affectionately,  
“CAROLINE.”

But this better understanding between her and her husband was soon to suffer a serious strain.

In November of the same year her second son, Brinsley, was born, and in spite of this new addition to the household, in January 1832 George Norton's elder sister, Augusta, came to pay her brother a long visit. It was the same sister who had made rather a favourite of Caroline while she was still a schoolgirl at Wonersh; but the old liking was not strong enough to persist in the more intimate and difficult relation of sisters-in-law. Miss Norton was something of an invalid, and needed the services of her own maid to wait on her. She was also an exceedingly eccentric person, and, when she did appear in the world, affected a sort of Bloomer costume, a short dress with trousers, her hair cropped like a man's, with various other masculine singularities.

It is a well-known fact that no people are so sensitive to ridicule as those who have a talent for it. It is therefore not unnatural that Caroline should have shrunk a little from accompanying Miss Norton in public. Thence arose real evasions, fancied slights, the retirement of the visitor to her room for days, complaints and self-justification to George Norton, who at last, in a fit of temper, declared that his wife should go nowhere his sister was not invited, that he would cut the traces of the carriage if she presumed

to disobey him. As this lady's visit lasted till April, and Mrs. Norton continued to appear at most of the fashionable gatherings during the winter of 1832, besides entertaining constantly at home, we must believe that the usual compromise was effected between husband and wife. But there was an ungracious influence at work about them both all through that winter: resentment and impatience on the part of the sister at each new evidence of the brother's subservience to his wife's influence, irritation on the part of the young hostess at this alien presence at her fireside—this unfriendly critic of herself, her friends, the management of her household, which last must often have suffered in the struggle to combine the obligations of a woman writing hard for money, and a woman of the world going almost every night into society. There was another still more painful point of difference between these two sisters-in-law, for Miss Norton's visit had fallen in the very midst of the excitement of the Reform Bill, and height of the struggle for or against the passage of this measure between Lord Grey's Ministry and the Tory opposition.

George Norton, as a beneficiary of the Whig Government, must have somewhat subdued his hereditary prejudices on the subject, but Augusta, like all the Nortons, was a high Tory; and great must have been her disgust at seeing her brother's wife in the forefront of those female politicians who supported the Bill through thick and thin. At this late day it is hard to realise the wild and general excitement of that period, even among people usually indifferent to politics—the bitter personal feeling between the Bill's supporters and the Opposition, the friendships severed for years or never reunited, the private quarrels which can be traced back to this great public question—the first and most fruitful cause of all subsequent ill-feeling and misunderstanding.

In this case, at least, it is not too much to say that

nothing in her future was to work Mrs. Norton greater harm than the unfriendliness of this particular sister-in-law, an unfriendliness which might always have been latent in the fundamental difference of those two temperaments, but which would never have been fanned into such a burning flame of spite and malice as it later manifested without some such blast of public excitement as the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832.

A pretty letter to Babbage, rather a great personage in his day, the inventor of a calculating machine and a writer on the science of mathematics, begging him to interest himself in the great struggle is amusing evidence of her activities during this period.

“ Saturday, May 2, 1832.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ You will, I fear, think me very impertinent in addressing you, but my sister, Lady Seymour (who is more fortunate in being better acquainted with you), is in Wiltshire, and Seymour in Devonshire, where we heartily wish you could pay him a visit. I don't know whether Lady Seymour's anxiety for Lord John's [Russell's] success will weigh with you. She was conceited enough to say to me one day when we were reading your 'Apology' in Mrs. Leicester Stanhope's album, 'Mr. Babbage likes *me*!' But whether your imagined preference be great enough to induce you to exert yourself in the same cause as Seymour, I dare not conjecture. All I can say is, that it would be doing a great favour not only to Lord John but to friends of yours who are also friends of his. It is the first year Georgie Seymour has seemed eager about politics; you will not instruct her so harshly in philosophy as to teach her how to bear a first disappointment?

“ Not having your name to aid us is as if you made a long speech in favour of Mr. Parker—which is not, surely, what you intend; is it?

“ Pray, pray, do not be angry with me—great anxiety will make one bold, and the last thing I have intended is any disrespect towards you. I know it will be a great disappointment to Georgie, I am certain it

will be a great disappointment to Seymour. For myself, I do not say anything but that it is not my first year of anxiety in the cause. Whichever way you decide, let me have one line to say you are not displeased with me. I shall value it as an autograph even if you refuse our petition.

" May I get up a petition with many signatures (all ladies) begging you to go down and vote ?

" With repeated apologies,

" Believe me, dear Sir,

" Yours very truly,

" CAROLINE NORTON.

" 2, STOREY'S GATE, ST. JAMES'S PARK."

The soft persuasions of this letter had their desired effect on Mr. Babbage, who remained a warm friend of Mrs. Norton's for many years to come.

It was during the last winter of this stormy struggle that she sat for her portrait to John Hayter, a fashionable painter of the day. He painted her twice, once in profile and once nearly full face, with her familiar downcast look ; this last picture especially, very handsome, very Eastern-looking, and, according to Fanny Kemble, very like her, but "not her handsomest look." One wonders whether it was the custom in those days for lovely young married women to sit unchaperoned to fashionable painters in the latter's studios, or whether the incident told in the following extract from Moore's diary is only another example of the daring unconventionality which gave society so many handles against Mrs. Norton when her great break with her husband put her at the mercy of public opinion.

" *April 5.—Called upon Mrs. Norton; found her preparing to go to Hayter's, who was painting a picture of her; and offered to walk with her. Had accordingly a very brisk and agreeable walk across the two Parks, and took her in the highest bloom of beauty to Hayter, who said he wished that some one would always put her through this process before she sat to him. Hayter's picture promises well.*

"Happening to mention that almost everything I wrote was composed in my garden or the fields, 'One would guess that of your poetry,' said Mrs. Norton. 'It quite smells of them.'"

It was in this year 1832 that she assumed the editorship of *La Belle Assemblée and Court Magazine*, a small monthly periodical whose name denotes the class of people it was expected to please, not, as it would first seem, any attempt to chronicle the doings and fashions of the Court itself. To this she contributed a variety of articles, stories, and poetry, and book reviews, signed and unsigned, the most noteworthy among them being a series of satirical papers on "The Peculiar Customs of the County of Middlesex," "The Invisibility of London Husbands," "Great Ladies," "The Law of Libel," etc.

Later in the summer she went with her children and her husband to Scotland—he to pay his usual visit to Lady Menzies on Loch Rannoch—she as soon as she could to escape that ungracious hostess for kinder friends of her own. From the house of one of these she writes the following letter to her husband.

"DEAR GEORGE,

"I fear this will be but a hurried line, for they do run about so all day in the open air that time slips away till we dress for dinner. Penny [Spencer] is very well indeed, and I have bought some flannel at Dundee to roll him in. I have not heard again of Baby.

"Lady — is come with a sweet little child for Penny to play with. Lord —, and Mr. —, and Lord — come to-morrow. We are asked to Camperdown. I saw the handsome old Lord — and a young one. Come back, darling, I am wishing for you. To drive four small piebald ponies, and swing, and flinging beech-nuts at one another's heads is all we do; and very good sport it is. I shall write you again to-morrow or next day, and pray write to me. I have



MRS. NORTON.

After the portrait by John Hayter.



not heard of you yet. Direct — Perthshire. It comes quicker.

"Tell Mrs. Charles Norton there never was anything so beautiful as the room she is to have in right of being a bride—an enormous room looking on the lawn, and ebony furniture and the most magnificent things in it. Ditto dressing-room for Charles.

"The house is lovely, and there are eight new rooms furnished. God bless you. Love to all.

"Ever your

"CAREY.

"HON. G. NORTON,  
"RANNOCH LODGE,  
"August 30, 1832."

## CHAPTER V

### GEORGE NORTON—FAMILY LETTERS

THE next winter there were no disturbing visitors at Storey's Gate, and there was even more entertaining in the tiny drawing-room.

We read of a birthday dinner given by his sister to Brinsley Sheridan, the eldest of the family, just home from India, at which not the least distinguished guest was young Mr. Disraeli, then chiefly known as his father's son and the author of the clever novel, "Vivian Grey." The young writer was very much taken with all the Sheridans, and his letters written to his sister during this year and the next have frequent mention of hours spent among them, their beauty, their wit, their agreeable companionship, in terms too often quoted to be more than referred to here. But there is one funny little incident belonging to this time and this connection, which comes from another source, and may well be repeated as it was told long afterwards to the American Minister, Motley, by Lady Dufferin.

"He was once dining with my insufferable brother-in-law, Mr. Norton, (of course, long before the separation), when the host begged him to drink a particular kind of wine, saying he had probably never tasted anything so good before. Disraeli agreed that the wine was very good.

"'Well,' said Norton, 'I have got wine twenty times as good in my cellar.'

"'No doubt—no doubt,' said Dizzy, looking round the table, 'but, my dear fellow, this is quite good enough for such canaille as you have got to-day.'

"Everybody saw that the remark was intended as a slap for Mr. Norton, except that individual himself, who was too obtuse to feel it."

He was probably often too obtuse to feel it, and yet often ill at his ease in the society his wife was able to gather around her. So far removed were those two from each other in tastes and capacities, that nothing could be permanent between them but the discomfort of living together. Though, as is often the case with such eternal unfitness, when everything was prosperous and every one was well, things would move along with every appearance of real harmony. But let once come the strain of illness, or weariness, or disappointment, and then all the wretched old differences sprang to the surface again.

In the spring of 1833 Mrs. Norton found herself again about to have a child, and for the first time she seems to have felt herself unequal to all the demands her life continued to make upon her.

Besides the *Court Magazine*, she had assumed the editorship of the *English Annual* for 1834, one of those publications so fashionable in her own day, appearing just before each new year, composed of beautiful steel engravings and sentimental extracts in prose and verse, prepared especially for and by the English upper classes. Indeed, the very existence of these Annuals depended on titled scribblers who were content to furnish their contributions merely for the pleasure of seeing themselves in print, or on fledgling poets who liked to find themselves in such company. The most successful editor was, therefore, some woman, like the Countess of Blessington, whose social and literary distinction could draw about her the greatest number of these unpaid contributors.

Mrs. Norton's own contributions to the *English*

*Annual* during the two years she conducted it were chiefly old articles in verse and prose which had already appeared in her own *Court Magazine*, but her friends, and especially her own family, were all applied to for original manuscripts. An amusing letter written to her sister, Lady Seymour, hardly three weeks before her last child was born, gives a good idea of her various and exhausting activities during this critical period.

"*August 3, 1833.*  
(Postmark).

"Pine not, oh daughter of the Maccacey tribe,  
neither cease to adorn thy hair with sea-shell and  
coral, for thy tribe have not forgotten thee, but see  
thy place still empty among them, and weep (when  
they have time) that thou art in the land of Bantams  
while they are in the Town of Fowl Deeds."

[Lady Seymour was very much interested in country  
pleasures, and had white and coloured bantams. The  
title by which she is here addressed refers to one of  
her contributions to her sister's magazine.]

"I have been going to write for some days, but have  
been waiting till Ferraro had finished a little frame for  
a card drawing of Hermione [Lady Seymour's eldest  
daughter], which my fingers sketched and painted the  
last day of her sojourn at Hampton Court. I drove  
down in the gig with Spencer and John, with three  
pencils and a night gown, to the said Palace, and then  
and there achieved the deed. I trust you feel obliged  
to me, though I am afraid the many discontented  
touches which I have given it since have destroyed  
my likeness; it was done in a hurry, and she could not  
endure sitting. The moment a frame is ready I will  
send it down. I am very busy writing just now.  
Colburn has re-engaged me for the *New Monthly*, and  
I have *Friendship's Offering* and the *Keepsake* to see to  
before the 10th, besides my magazine (for which I am  
in hourly expectation of a long story from Seymour,  
or a continuation of his 'Few Words on Imposture'),  
and which must be ready by the 15th.

"Mamma is in town; why, she does not say, but she  
never went further than Portsmouth, and met in the

coach from thence a female cretin who had travelled in the Cordillera Mountains, and whom she engaged immediately for the *Court Magazine*.

"Norton is surprised at my wanting to move anywhere,<sup>1</sup> and assures me he has only money to take himself to Scotland; but I think he will finally allow three weeks or so at the Isle of Wight, as it will be very cheap in September, the regattas, etc., being over.

"The Treasurer of Covent Garden and Drury Lane called on me to request me to 'oppose by every vote in my power the Dramatic Representation Bill, and to stretch out the hand of their greatest dramatist's granddaughter to save the two large theatres from ruin.' I thought they exaggerated the strength of my arm, but promised them fair, and the Bill has failed in consequence.

"Farewell. Love to Seymour and that dear Fatty your youngest daughter.

"Yours ever affectionately,  
"CAR."

A little later comes the following :

"DEAREST GEORGIE,

"I send Mione's picture. Perhaps you will think it too harsh; the eye of a fond parent has a beam in it which prevents it seeing clearly. I can improve and alter it at any time when you have it with you. The beastly frame has been the cause of the delay.

"I have had another giggle; a book was sent me with a very civil note begging me to accept So-and-So's little tract upon the 'Truth.' I read it, and thought it was some religious man looking after me, but opening the parcel before I went to bed, I was agreeably surprised at finding a tract on the 'Teeth,' by Mr. Nicholles, surgeon-dentist. I opened it: it was a good-sized book, bound in crimson silk and beautifully printed, and after the title page came a grey satin presentation page inscribed in very large gilt letters with my illustrious name!

<sup>1</sup> After her confinement.

"Sunday.—I giggle not, I am frenzied with rage. I send Mione without a frame. Think, after waiting so long, of my getting a horrid, large, cumbersome, coarse thing, forty times too big, and the oval centre three times as large as the drawing. I am so disappointed. But I will get another—it looks so much better in the frame, a peculiarity which must give a great idea of my style of painting.

"Thank Seymour very much for the notice of national education. I thought it very clever and droll, though shocked at any measure of this Government being abused in my magazine. Lord Melbourne was greatly pleased at 'The Life of a Woman of the Maccay Tribe.' Mrs. Charles [Norton] wrote me so funny an account of the bothers of moving with the regiment that I have printed it, 'with additions and alterations,' in the magazine. Anything anybody will send will be gratefully received for the month I must be in bed. I hear Nell is ill, poor thing, and none the better for the Isle of Wight. Farewell. I think you will not hear from me again till the great event is over. I dare say I shall have a boy, because my heart is set the other way. I have, however, bought a white hood similar to one I generally gave you, and trimmed up the caps like Mione's. Love to Seymour. Let one or the other inscribe to me from time to time, as these waiting days are dull.

"Yours very affectionately,  
"CARRY."

These letters, so gay and courageous in their tone, do not tell half the strain she was under during the months before her baby was born. She was always a person whose sleep was easily broken, and moreover she was so extravagant of precious forces that she often wrote far into the night, at high pressure, to complete her tasks for the day. In the day she was at times languid, irritable, impatient beyond her usual habit, of everything around her. And her husband responded to the changed touch on the reins, like a vicious horse. That summer was the occasion of an access of brutal ill-treatment from him—so much

worse than anything she had hitherto experienced that she was driven for the first time to make an effort to escape from it. They had had one of their long wrangling discussions at dinner, till her patience suddenly gave way, and she left him abruptly, ordering him not to follow her, on the plea that she had writing to do in the drawing-room which must be finished that night, and that she did not wish to be disturbed. Her manner offended her husband's dignity. He was further outraged to find that her fit of quite excusable petulance had carried her so far as to make her lock the dining-room door after her as she went out. There was another door to the dining-room, opening direct into the Park. It was quite easy for him to let himself out by this and walk round the corner to the front door on Prince's Court, which his servant opened at his knock. But he had not the kind of temper to be cooled by such deliberate action—quite the reverse, in fact. He went upstairs, and finding the drawing-room door also locked, wrenched it from its fastening. He found his wife sitting at her little table, writing, with her maid sewing beside her. He ordered the woman to leave the room, and when her mistress commanded her at the same moment to remain, declaring that she was afraid to be left alone with her husband, he turned upon everything around them, throwing down the table, scattering in every direction the papers with which it was covered, blowing out and smashing the candle. Then, calmed perhaps by the effect of his own violence, he called for more lights and began to look about him with some return of his usual manner, till, seeing his wife not sufficiently cowed to conceal her scorn of such an extraordinary exhibition, he suddenly fell upon her, with a fierceness so far beyond anything she had ever seen in him before that she thought he had gone out of his senses, and actually feared for her life as she felt herself being forced out of the room and down the stairs. It was only with the help of her servants that

she was able at last to free herself from his hands, and escape upstairs to her children's nursery, where she spent the night.

The next day she was too ill to follow her first inclinations and leave his house for ever; but matters had reached a point when her own family felt obliged to interfere. Her family, indeed, were more severe on her husband than she was, insisting upon a written pledge from him to them of his future good behaviour before they allowed her to come back to him. She apparently would have been content with his word, and some sign that he was sorry for what he had made her suffer.

It is not surprising under the circumstances to hear that when her third son was born, August 26, 1833, she had a very bad confinement, and a slow and difficult recovery.

There is a letter to her mother, written painfully at intervals during her illness.

*"Wednesday, 11th.*

" DEAREST MOTHER,

" I got your letter, and very glad I was to get it, for the chances of wind and wave seemed much against safe travelling. [Mrs. Sheridan was then at the Isle of Wight, though she had evidently been with her daughter at the time of the latter's confinement.]

" I beg pardon for not having answered it, but I have been obliged to see Bull and look over papers . . . and what with Lilly's restrictions and another headache, all my friends have been allowed to languish in ignorance. [Lilly was the monthly nurse.] I am going on perfectly well as to nursing, etc., but the pain in my back is little decreased, and has taken to itself a wife in the shape of a pain down my left leg to the knee . . . however, this, my only disease, seems better to-day (my first day in the drawing-room), and I hope it will go off, and just give me, like Georgia, a good year for hops.

" My dear little Too-too is apparently to be the beauty of the family, but I think his eyes will be black. You perceive by the 'but' that I prefer the

blue eye and black eyebrows, which you amused yourself making for the best-looking of your progeny, and indeed that sort of colouring has an expression of its own, independent of feature. Look at Lady Jersey."

She goes back to her interview with Bull, the proprietor of her *Court Magazine*, the beginning of the difficulties which ended in her giving up the editorship of that little periodical.

"After all my trouble and ambitious hopes, Bull wants to do his work himself; in fact, to have no sub-editor. I have promised to experimentalise accordingly, but I regret his beginning to shrink from expenses. He says also that nine or ten guineas a month are all that can be spent on the literary portion. This is very little; it makes two-thirds of the book a gratis performance, but it is something to have one's own way.

"Nurse me the magic story whose banns with your novel I forbid, and let me have a colonist story about the Cape, Dutch and English; there is no colony of equal importance so little talked about as the Cape (in books). I engage you professionally. Also Nelly, if her lazy pate will send to the pen in her lazy *patte* an Inkle and Yarico story in those woods she is so fond of painting. . . .

"I have been two days getting through this elaborate epistle. I can't see and I can't sit up without getting blind and aching. I long to be at the seaside. Charles Sheridan [her uncle] I think will go with me, and promises me the use of a horse bought from Blank, and therefore liable to make 'faux-pas.' Give my love to Nelly. I would fain write to her, but cannot. Let her write to me again. . . .

"Ever your affectionate  
"CAR. NORTON."

She did at last manage to get away with all three children to the seaside at Worthing. Later in the same autumn we find her making a visit with her husband in the country.

A letter to her mother describing her journey there

gives a characteristic glimpse of that gentleman as a travelling companion.

“DEAR MOTHER,

“Here we are, after a most uncomfortable and wearing day. We got up at six, and actually at eight, when I stood prepared to start, I found Norton writing an estimate of repairs for the buggy! It was nine before we got to —. The consequences were two-fold. First, we were forced to take four horses the last thirty miles ; and, second, we quarrelled about it. The roads were exceedingly heavy, and I was starved, so I paid the extras. We should have come in time for dinner but for a little accident. One of the postillions was thrown, and they stopped to bleed the horse ; the man was as nearly killed as possible ; the wheel went over his hand, and the carriage was stopped just in time to spare his head. It made me nervous, especially as we kept backing into a ditch all the time on very frosty grass. . . .

“Moore is here, and very amusing. He says when first Lady Holland heard he was to bring out ‘Lalla Rookh,’ she said, ‘What’s that Irish thing, Larry Rourke, that you are to bring out?’

“Lady Barrington is just gone. Our present party are Lord John Russell, Lord Auckland, and some young men who run in and out, but I cannot distinguish them one from the other or find out their names.

“Baby bore it very well and has not taken cold. I wish for a line to tell me how you feel. Nothing can be worse for everybody than this weather, soaking wet. My hands shake with cold, and my head aches like ten.”

From the same place comes the following letter to Lady Seymour :

“DEAR GEORGIE,

“This place is supereminently dull, though all the people are charming in their different ways. There is a stiffness, a punctuality, a shyness about every one in the house which makes me think of the famous fairy tale in which the air froze the words before they

reached the sea they were intended for. Lord Auckland I like very much ; he has a very grave, gentle manner, with a good deal of dry fun about him. Emily Eden is undeniably clever and pleasant. . . . We have had Tom Moore, and still preserve a very clever little man, a Mr. Burn, employed by Government to make discoveries in Asia and Africa and other little places. He is exceedingly amusing, without being the least by way of giving us 'information.' . . .

"About coming to you, dear, which I wish very much, I must yet await many decisions. I think I might come for a few days, and have sent on your letter to Norton, who is at Guildford 'recording' [Mr. Norton held for a great many years the office of Recorder for Guildford]. My great puzzle at this moment is what to do with Charles Sheridan, who very good-naturedly offered to come with us and halve the expenses of posting, and if I go round without him, lo ! where shall I get cash ? for I spent so much at Worthing that I really am quite dependent on Norton now. About rooms, you need not mind for me. Pearce can sleep on the ground and sing herself to rest with the song, 'My lodging is,' etc., and the baby either with me or her. . . . Norton cannot leave town any more now, so the only point is whether he will give leave, and whether dear fidgety uncle will make some plan for himself and money, money, MONEY ! We have our own carriage and must post.

"I shall be so glad to introduce my small William to 'the Saxon bundle.' "

[Lady Seymour's second daughter Ulrica (fair hair), afterwards married to Lord Henry Thynne.]

## CHAPTER VI

### TRIP ABROAD—BRINSLEY'S MARRIAGE

NOTHING is more noticeable in every mention of the Sheridan family at this time than the liking they seemed to have for being together. The married sisters were constantly inviting each other and their brothers and mother and uncle to each other's houses, and strangers were always finding that wonderful group—"Mrs. Norton, looking as if she were made of precious stones, diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires; Lady Seymour, with her waxen, round white arms and eyes streaming with soft brilliancy, like fountains by moonlight"; Mrs. Sheridan, more beautiful than anybody but her daughters; young Brinsley, "the only respectable one of the family," as his sister once mischievously remarked to Disraeli, qualifying it at once with the conclusion, "and that is because he has a liver complaint," which fact did not prevent him from being six feet tall and as handsome and agreeable as any of his brothers and sisters; Lady Graham, their beautiful aunt; Mrs. Blackwood, who ought to have been the good one, according to Disraeli, "only I am not," as she assured him herself; and Frank and Charles, "younger brothers to the Apollo Belvedere."

Out of this love for each other's society there arose a plan for a family trip abroad in the August of 1834; the Seymours, Brinsley, and Mrs. Black-

wood, then living with her mother at Hampton Court in the absence of her husband on his frigate. "We shall go," says Lord Seymour in a letter to his father, "by Calais to Ghent, Antwerp, Cologne, and then embark on the Rhine, and when we are tired of German scenery we shall return to Brussels and see Leopold in all his glory. We shall return probably in November."

At first it was not expected that the Nortons were to be included in this expedition, but at the last moment she was able to persuade her sulky husband to forgo his usual shooting season in Scotland, and join the others, on condition, however, that she, not he, furnished the wherewithal for the trip. No very easy undertaking, one may believe, for her long illness at William's birth had been followed by another which had kept her confined to her room for some time during the following winter. At the same time, the abrupt conclusion of her engagement with Bull, proprietor of the *Court Magazine*, had put an end to one sure source of income.

She tried to get Murray to take a poem she had just finished.

"August 2, 1834.

"SIR,

"When my poem, 'The Undying One,' was first written it was offered to you with a very overrated idea of what it was worth, in many respects.

"You refused to publish it, and favoured me at the time with some criticisms on the style and subjects, which I have always remembered, though the temptation to publish it at the time was very strong, and I therefore agreed with Mr. Colburn, who made your refusal a plea for fulfilling only one half of his original agreement. I have now another, a shorter poem by me, called 'The Maiden's Dream.' I have taken pains with it, and have avoided, as far as I could, all the faults imputed to my first attempt. My wish is to print it with fugitive pieces, in one volume, and sell the MS. for £100; but I would willingly give the

MS. without the last-named condition, if you would undertake the publication. I saw that you had printed Lady E. Wortley's poems. For many years you have been the encourager and supporter of poetical talent, and as I am still as eager (though, I hope, more humble than when I set out), I hope you do not mean to make me the exception to your rule.

"If you would see me on this subject to-morrow before five, and would name the hour most convenient, Mr. Norton would accompany me to Albemarle Street. I mention to-morrow, because it is one of Mr. Norton's very few leisure days, and if that is inconvenient I shall hope to be able to fix another.

"I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
"C. NORTON."

Murray's answer to this was a refusal. Indeed it was several years before this particular poem appeared in print. But she at last found a publisher so obliging that he was willing to contract with her for a story not yet written, Messrs. Saunders & Otley, who afterwards brought out her first long novel "The Wife." With this in prospect, she set off with her husband and joined the others at Antwerp. One of the prettiest of her later poems is written in description of this journey :

#### EHRENBREITSTEIN

"Oh, mighty fortress, lovely Rhine !  
How well those scenes my heart remembers,  
Though since I last beheld them, Time  
Hath changed my life with ten Septembers.  
But that September who shall tell  
The joy, the triumph, the delight  
Of setting off for foreign lands,  
And travelling on, by day and night ?  
Who shall describe how pleased we were,  
The large home party, setting forth  
To bask in sunshine carelessly,  
And seek adventures south and north ?  
The journal-books and sketch-books, kept  
Under such sacred lock and key  
(Except—and that was every day—  
When careless owners left them free),

Which woke within our busy minds  
For art and memories such a rage.  
We could not pass the first hotel  
Without the subject for a page.

" And then, in spite of rattling wheels,  
The long, long letters written home  
To tell of distant Germany,  
To tell how glad we were to roam :  
How all along the vineyard grounds  
The stunted vines like currants grew,  
Not like those married to the elms  
Which our misleading fancy drew.  
How little Nonnenwerth was like  
An emerald in a silver setting ;  
How stupid one among us was,  
The passports and the trunks forgetting ;  
How all old legends were confirmed,  
Because we saw with our own eyes,  
Above the clear transparent wave,  
The towers of Rolandseck arise :  
And stamped on memory by the scene,  
All history's facts appeared to live,  
Presenting the mysterious charm  
Which 'picture books' to children give.

" The merry laughs, the active steps,  
The eager hearts, the curious eyes,  
The vine-clad hills, the crumbling towers,  
The deep blue wave, the sunny skies,  
The Grand Dukes, Archdukes, blandly kind ;  
The peasants, beautiful and poor ;  
The wonderful adventures (sent  
To every traveller on his tour) ;  
The wild, delightful, rambling days,  
Whose image, still surviving, seems  
That they alone of life seem real, -  
And all the rest but fading dreams.

" Oh river, at this present time  
How like thy unreturning tide,  
Bright, fleeting, wonderfully fair,  
Those vanished days before me glide.  
The journal now is locked away,  
The sketch-book opened with a sigh,  
And pictures of the lovely Rhine  
Are gazed at with a saddened eye :

Because so much that then was joy,  
Succeeding years have turned to pain ;  
So much can only grieve the heart,  
That made it beat with pleasure then."

But her enjoyment of the expedition soon received a disastrous check. As might have been expected, George Norton hated travel abroad. His relations with his brothers and sisters-in-law may at the moment have been friendly, but they hardly could have continued very cordial after the open family discussion which had taken place at his last outbreak against his wife. At his best moments he would have been of too alien a temper to add much to the enjoyment of the travelling party. No doubt they were all relieved when at Aix-la-Chapelle he fell ill of a lameness that kept him behind while they went on without him; except, of course, his wife, who had to swallow her disappointment as best she might and devote herself to the obvious duty of nursing him back to health. She was too kind really, too ready for any emergency of self-sacrifice to dream of doing anything else. But there was another side to her nature, the necessary complement perhaps of the extravagant generosity of her first impulses. She could not go on submitting to selfish tyranny day by day without a crumb of praise or appreciation. George Norton, however, was not the sort of man to think of others in his own discomfort. He could speak no foreign language, so he refused to be waited upon by any one but herself. He seldom consented to be left alone; and as day after day passed for her, shut up in a dreary hotel room with no society but that of a stupid, ill-tempered husband, she no doubt had plenty of time to ask herself whether, for this particular pleasure, she had not paid too much. Her melancholy letters to her family brought Brinsley back to bear her company, and soon they all joined forces again. But Mr. Norton's illness had not improved him as a travelling companion, though his wife was of course the chief victim

of his ill-temper, till at the end of a long day's journey, during which he had persisted in filling their little closed travelling carriage with the smoke of his "hookah," in spite of her reiterated entreaty that it was making her ill, her thin-worn endurance gave way, and she snatched at the pipe and flung the mouthpiece out of the window. The carriage was then slowly ascending a hill. He got out and recovered the missing part of the pipe, and then came back to repay her for her loss of temper by a savage onslaught, which left the marks of his fingers on her throat, and from which she with difficulty escaped by slipping out of the half-closed door of the carriage to run after the others and entreat some one of her family to travel with them and protect her from further ill-usage—for all which she forgave him more quickly than her family did. From this time forth all that was friendly in *their* relations with their brother-in-law ceased, and never was renewed again. They took her on with them to Paris, where she wrote somewhat later, in answer to a complaining and repentant letter from him :

" DEAR GEORGE,

" You can't think how I reproach myself at your being ill; it makes me quite unhappy; but it shall never happen again; your remorseful wife promises you faithfully. You are a good, kind husband in the long run, and don't believe me when I say harsh things to you, waking or sleeping; balance my words that night against the day you woke me. Glad to make friends and happy to see you at Paris, and forgive me! Come early on Wednesday. God bless you, dear. Mind you write.

" Ever your affectionate

" CAR."

The miracle of such a tone to a husband from whom she had received such brutal treatment—a husband against whom she had often expressed the bitterest resentment and contempt—is perhaps less amazing

than the miracle it would have been for a woman like her, deeply affectionate and generous-hearted, to have gone on living with him year after year in the intimate relation of his wife, the mother of his children, the daily companion and sharer of his most serious interests and anxieties, without some moments of tenderness, of close rapprochement, without, it may be, some moments of genuine passion.

The appearance of the three beautiful Sheridans made quite a furore in the French capital.

Henry Greville, a brother of Charles, in a description of the citizen King Louis Philippe and his Court, concludes :

*"November 27.—In the evening a good many English came to be presented at the Tuileries—among them the three Sheridan sisters: when they came in the King exclaimed, 'What a batch of them!'"*

Mr. Greville went to a dinner at the Granvilles' a few days later and sat next Mrs. Norton, who was very amusing. "Her beauty and that of Lady Seymour make a prodigious sensation here," he remarks in his journal under that date.

Lady Granville has her usual little slap to administer in a letter to her sister, Lady Carlisle. "I will tell you how Norton behaves in my next. The French are sorry Blackwood goes to the Opera in a skull-cap."

Lord Brougham was also in Paris—out of office, like all the other Whigs—and full of the story of the King's surprising dismissal of Lord Melbourne (who had been Prime Minister since Lord Grey's resignation in the spring of 1834); full of everything that had been going on in London during the autumn, from the burning of the Houses of Parliament to the Queen's part in the dismissal of the hated Whig Ministers; "but writing as much as he talked, a sublime quack," remarked Lady Granville, as she tells her sister of his devotion to Mrs. Norton. Not to her

alone, however. "He sits with Lady Clanricarde,—the Princess Belgioso,—Mrs. Norton,—two hours at a time in the morning."

Lord Lyndhurst had succeeded Lord Brougham as Lord Chancellor of the new Peel Ministry, sometimes called the 100 days, as it held power only till the following April. Lord Lyndhurst is interesting to Americans as having been born in Boston while it was still a colony of Great Britain, in which town descendants of the Copley family still live. He had begun life as a Whig, and his enemies accused him of turning Tory, less from principle than for what it would bring him. But, Whig or Tory, he was always a warm friend of the Sheridan sisters, especially Caroline; and more was to be hoped from him in the way of her husband's advancement than ever could be obtained from Brougham, or even Lord Melbourne, whose initial act of benevolence to Mr. Norton threatened to be his last.

All the family spent Christmas with Mrs. Sheridan at Hampton Court after the various separations which had made the deserted nursery seem such a mournful place to Georgie Sheridan. Even Frank was back from Ireland with his chief, Lord Mulgrave, out of office for the moment with the rest of Melbourne's Government. A letter from Mrs. Norton to her husband, still in the spirit of their last reconciliation, gives an account of her plans and interests in the coming year.

*"January 1.*

"MY DEAREST GEORDIE,

"I wish there were franks, but there are none now to make a stupid letter tolerable. I am very much vexed about poor Charlie, who has been in his bed these three days; and Fincham (the apothecary) says he requires the greatest care. I have made tea for him these two past evenings; he is quite low and dull, and Frank does not seem to think much about him. To-day is the 1st of January, so before I go further let me wish you a Happy New Year, and

many of them, dear Geordie, in quietness and comfort at home, and what prosperity may chance abroad. I have sat the whole day with Heath [the publisher of the *Keepsake* and *English Annual*]; Reynolds [editor for the *English Annual* for 1836]; also Lord Mulgrave. I have taken the editorship of the *Keepsake*, and Mr. Heath informed me of what he was pleased to call a horrible attempt on the part of Mr. Bull, Holles Street, and an actionable offence. This was that it seems Bull has published and cunningly sent to Paris, an annual called the *English Annual*, and on which is impudently printed 'Edited by Mrs. Norton.' I have sent for the book, and expressed the utmost indignation and astonishment. I shall give you an amusing account of this interview when we meet. Nothing is droll upon paper, and one can't write down the tone of voice in which a thing was said. Heath seemed struck with my personal charms, and requested me to sit to Ross for next year's 'Book of Beauty,' which I agreed to do. Lord Melbourne has lent me a curious book (Dr. Lardner's Letters), in which the Doctor proves that Mary Magdalen was the most virtuous of her sex. I have not yet looked at it, as I do not wish to lose the post to you, but am very curious to see it proved. I was showing the opera-glass you gave me to the boys, and Brinny said, 'What do you see?' 'I see your dear little dirty face,' quoth I; I then handed it to him, and said, 'What do you see?' 'I see your dear big dirty face,' said he. Wasn't it quick and funny? The other laughed amazingly at this filial impertinence. Spencer's good things I must not omit. We were sitting with Charlie, and he was dull. 'Now,' says he, 'let's resign.' 'What do you mean?' said I. 'People says resign when they goes out,' quoth he. So much for living with Ministers! With these anecdotes I conclude my shabby little letter, hoping to hear from you that any little unpleasantness brought you by Grantley when you thought you were doing for the best is over and explained away. The boys send their love. Brin says gravely, 'Have you told Papa about your poor little sick brother?'

"Yours ever affectionately,

"C.

"Mamma begs you to drink melted gum from Arabia in all your drinks. Take care, dear Geordie."

She tells another funny story about this same little Brinsley, in a letter to her sister written later in the year from Richmond, where she had been "taking a tiny frisk of three days at the Star and Garter."

"I took Brinsley to Richmond, and the first day he walked out he saw a fat sow eating cabbage. He struck with a stick against the sty and called out, 'You fat pig, you is eating too much.' He continued his walk and returning by the sty, peeped in. The sow was asleep, but Brin thought she was dead, and shook his head mournfully. 'The great pig is dead, poor sing! He is dead. I knowed he was eating too much. I said: 'You is eating too much,' and he wouldn't be dood. Oh, the poor sing!"

The next event of importance among the Sheridan brothers and sisters was the runaway marriage of Brinsley Sheridan and Miss Marcia Grant, only daughter of an old Waterloo officer, Sir Colquhoun Grant, an heiress in her own right. The whole history of the elopement was like a leaf from the great Sheridan's personal history, or a page from one of his comedies. Whether rightly or wrongly however the praise or blame of the achievement fell less on the eloping bridegroom than on his three sisters.

"Were the laws of witchcraft still enforced in England, these beautiful sisters would stand a chance of being burned at the stake. To these three sisters, as to the three fates, the world of fashion attribute the working of that mysterious spell which caused a young heiress to marry according to her own inclinations."

Such was the notice that appeared in one of the fashionable journals on May 23, 1835, by which time the news of this runaway marriage had become public property. Certainly, Mrs. Norton and Lady Seymour

had to bear more of the serious consequences to this tragi-comic affair than either of the principal actors in it. Sir Colquhoun Grant was at Poole as candidate for a contested election on the day his daughter ran off to Scotland with Mr. Sheridan. But he had left his kinsman, Sir Robert MacFarlane, to look after his daughter in his absence, and as soon as this gentleman heard of the young lady's disappearance, he hastened to Spring Gardens and demanded to see Lady Seymour—refusing to be denied; and at last forced his way upstairs, where he found further proof of the justice of his suspicions, in the group assembled in the drawing-room—Mrs. Sheridan, Mrs. Blackwood, and Mr. and Mrs. Norton, besides Lady Seymour and her husband, "In whose presence," to quote from the challenge which Sir Colquhoun Grant afterwards sent Lord Seymour, "Sir R. MacFarlane required of your wife intelligence of my daughter's flight. This in your hearing Lady Seymour refused, and you did not insist on her answering."

In the course of the next three weeks Sir Colquhoun Grant had challenged and fought a duel with Lord Seymour. He had also informed George Norton that only his position of magistrate saved him, too, from being called on for the same satisfaction for his own and his wife's connection with the matter. Mr. Norton hastened in a long and somewhat laboured reply to explain his presence in Spring Gardens on the night of the elopement, as in no way connected with, indeed, in entire ignorance of, his brother-in-law's intentions. He had, in fact, dropped in after dinner to get his wife, who was going on with him to Lansdowne House, and had been informed of what had taken place, only a few moments before the arrival of Sir Robert himself. But Sir Colquhoun continued unpeased, and for a little while it seemed possible that the whole Sheridan connection would have to stand a prosecution for conspiracy. "Should this succeed," remarked a flippant society journal, "all the members of a

talented family must compose their minds and their poetry in prison for a year or more."

Brinsley had to cut short his honeymoon at Netherby, lent by Sir James Graham for the occasion, and appear in London in answer to a summons of Chancery on a charge of abduction, brought against him by his irate father-in-law. But, to quote again from the *Court Journal*:

"In all the attempts made to cast blame on the participants no word has been spoken against the character and conduct of young Sheridan. It is in evidence that he is gifted with singular personal advantages, rich in the endowments of a cultivated mind and brilliant talents, and that he is well, if not nobly connected, his mother being own cousin to the Marchioness of Londonderry. Fortune was all he wanted."

No runaway match indeed ever turned out better. No couple were ever more truly attached to each other, or lived afterwards in closer union. And even Sir Colquhoun did not long delay his reconciliation with his son-in-law, and when he died, the following December, his Dorsetshire estate and much of his other property descended to his daughter, besides the large fortune which she already possessed. It may be added that Brinsley Sheridan had no debts to cause any inroads on that fortune.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WIFE—MRS. NORTON LEAVES HER HUSBAND

MRS. NORTON's first long novel made its appearance the same spring as her brother's elopement. Her own and her publishers' expectations for it may be seen in the following extract from a letter to her sister :

" My book comes out on Wednesday, and I will have it sent down to you immediately. Nothing can be more gentlemanlike than they (the publishers) have been to me. I had, you know, £100 conditional on a second edition ; well, they said they should be loth to pay me so bad a compliment as to leave what implied a doubt of my success and their own, and gave me the whole £300 instead of £200, and I am much pleased. In spite of my oaths against writing, when they offered me £500 clear and unconditional on delivery of the MS. of '*Erbenfeldt*' next January, I became tempted. ' In short, I fell,' as they say in the '*Man of Honour*', and I have signed an agreement to do so. I read '*Erbenfeldt*' again, and am vexed to see how much better I wrote then, when I had not scribbled so much, or so much against the grain. I find a volume and a half (nearly) is already done, and of course I am glad to know that the enforced labour which you and Seymour put me to before my Bradley meals is not to be wasted 'entirely.' "

But her own and her publishers' expectations for her future in this new field of literary work were doomed to disappointment. Her "*Erbenfeldt*" never

saw the light, was probably still unfinished when its author went down into that sea of misfortune which, for a time at least, overwhelmed so many of her hopes and ambitions. But even if the MS. had been delivered according to contract on the first of the following January, it is not likely that her publishers would have wished to produce it after the comparative failure of her first novel, of which I can find no record except a few very sharp reviews and one small edition, long out of print.

Yet, in spite of its lack of commercial success, this novel showed a decided advance, from a literary point of view, upon the short stories and sketches hitherto signed with her name.

"The Wife and Woman's Reward" is not one story, but two quite separate tales, published together in the usual three volumes of fiction. The first is an account of the extraordinary devotion of an elder sister for a brother, left to her care by a dying father. Lord Melbourne's criticism in one of his letters to the author is interesting in his recognition of some of the characteristics of the unpleasant brother as borrowed from George Norton.

"I have been reading your book, and have finished the second volume. It's full of most excellent things. Lionel is too d——d a beast, and Mary makes a great deal too much sacrifice for him, but it is not unnatural. Many people have acted as amiably, as romantically, and as foolishly. I think, in order to take advantage of what you have observed in other people's characters you have put into his what did not belong to it. For instance, his being so disagreeable upon the journey —calculating the currency, and admiring nothing fine and beautiful either in nature or art—is what has struck you in others and you have grafted it on him."

The following is one of the passages referred to :

"He was continually occupying himself with trivial anxieties which for the time assumed an intense

importance. Restless and wretched, he fidgeted about all the little events and minor details of their journey. He spent the first two stages of every day's journey in counting over again the bills which had already been paid, and consulting different estimates of the different rates of the currency in the countries they were to pass through. He was always looking for a lost book, or a mislaid paper knife, or an undiscoverable travelling cap : always wondering whether the road they were going was really and actually the best road to the place of their destination, and calculating what hour they should arrive ; always abusing the last hotel-keeper and swearing against the bore of a long journey."

But though Mrs. Norton here stands convicted of using her nearest and those who ought to have been her dearest for literary copy, she was no more sparing of herself in the same cause. The following little speech which an old lady who lives in Spring Gardens addressed to Mary, the heroine of the "*Woman's Reward*," might easily be addressed to her own experience :

"I do not think, my dear, that I am so selfish as to wish you had drollery. It is so rare, drollery, as you term it, or even wit is seemly or graceful in a young woman ; the proneness to satire, the temptation to caricature make it at best a dangerous talent ; a thousand sayings are attributed to you which you know nothing of, and the reputation of being witty converts slight acquaintances into bitter enemies. Indeed, I think the less brilliant a woman's qualities and talents are, the better for her peace of mind and respectability through life.

"Consider how easy it is to create a laugh. There is scarcely any subject, however serious, that may not be so treated as to be made ridiculous ; coarseness of expression and licence of thought, abuse of one's neighbour, or immoral boasting, has been mistaken for wit. And those who laugh do not always approve.

"There is no quality which has so little the power of converting its admirers into friends.

"I recollect when I was young, I was remarked for this very talent—a talent the less to be envied, since it required merely high spirits, a desire to shine, and a moderate share of intellect in its possessor. My sayings were quoted ; I was thought amusing ; I made repartees to my enemies, and narrated stories for my friends ; and I assure you that many an hour of self-reproach followed those momentary triumphs, that I would have given worlds to recall some stinging reproach or light observation, and would rather have been reckoned dull than had that reputation (which I had) of being capable of giving up my dearest friend for the sake of a *bon mot*."

The second of these two tales has an extraordinary resemblance to Mrs. Norton's own early life. A young and beautiful woman married to a man she did not love ; a bride in London society, where the interest she excited "was not sympathy or kindness, or even curiosity, but a hard, unindulgent speculation as to what were her motives in the match, and what will be her conduct in the position in which she has placed herself." It is impossible for a woman having so lately undergone an almost parallel experience not to have drawn from her own heart the following description of the young wife's restless unhappiness during the first years of her married life :

" Many and many a day after that one which sealed her fate, it seemed to be a dream that she was indeed a wife, and she would start from her uneasy sleep with a vague feeling of remorse and regret, or that still vaguer sensation which comes upon us after great sorrow—the consciousness that we have some cause for grief, without the perfect memory of what it is. Then, as gradually the whole truth became present to her mind, she would close her eyes and strive to sleep again, to dream that she was free—sometimes the effort would succeed, wild, wandering visions would give her back all the bartered liberty of her youth ; the days would return when she had still the power to choose, and to refuse ; and she started and shrank to find how bitter was the waking which

brought back the truth to her heart. But oftener, far, far oftener, sleep refused its peace to her weary lids, and she remained, her eyes opened wide upon the cold blank darkness, reflecting on the change that had taken place in her destiny, while a strange, startled feeling chilled her heart ; and bitter was the agony with which, hiding her weeping face in her pillow, she murmured, 'I have sinned and deeply am I punished. Dreams comfort me in vain, I wake, I live, and I am bound for ever, and ever, and ever.' It was a heavy lead-like feeling."

The story still continues its self-revealing tone as it recounts Susan Dalrymple's social successes :

"Princes praised, poets flattered, and painters sketched her ; and her heart, restless and dissatisfied, gave itself up to the pleasures of the world, feeding its quenchless thirst at that fountain which never yet calmed or comforted—the glittering spring of vanity."

There is an account of her return after one of these evenings of social triumph, the deep depression that overtakes her as she sits afterwards alone in her room, gazing into her mirror—

"On her face reflected in that glass, and while she felt her possession of beauty such as is rarely bestowed, she also felt that it had never been to her other than a curse and a temptation ; with attraction enough, indeed, to burden her heart with bad men's sighs, but no power over those she wished to charm, like a demon gift which, with all the promise and appearance of gain, is somehow unaccountably made to turn to the disadvantage and ruin of its possessor. How often in the real world does this mockery of success attend us ? How often are we envied for the sake of what, after all, is but a demon gift ?"

Glenalton, the husband in the story, has very little resemblance to George Norton, except in his jealousy and in sudden accidental touches here and there in response to the evident likeness between George

Norton's own wife and Susan Dalrymple. A cousin of the husband's comes at last to live with them, an older woman, who soon obtains an amazing influence over both husband and wife, until Susan suddenly finds that her husband's feelings are being alienated from her, alienated just as she herself has begun to love him. It is at this point that all resemblance between the story and real life abruptly ceases. The heroine accidentally discovers the machinations of this false friend, and makes them useless by a frank appeal to her husband's real affection for her, which has persisted through all misunderstandings. "It would be needless to describe the scene of reconciliation between those divided hearts. Suffice it that peace and happiness were restored, and the trials to which Susan Dalrymple's rashness and imprudence had subjected her were ended for ever." When these words were written Mrs. Norton's own future still lay upon the knees of the gods. Her work is often blamed as too sad—even for truth. A comparison between this first attempt at sustained fiction and her next novel, written nearly twenty years later, makes one feel that it was her own true experience that made her later fiction so sad.

Who was the prototype of the false woman friend who worked such harm to Susan in the story of "*The Wife*," or if there was any prototype at all, it is impossible of course at this late date to tell. There was, however, this type, slender, subtle, designing, running through more than one of Mrs. Norton's later stories, till it reaches perfection in Alice, the half-sister of Sir Douglas, in the novel of that name. And there was a woman who might have given some material for it, older than Caroline, older probably than her husband—a kinswoman of his whom he mentions jokingly to his wife as early as 1834 as having shown a flattering preference for himself. This lady had estates in Yorkshire, but she lived in London, at No. 1, Lower Berkeley Street, Manchester Square. Her age

and relationship with Mr. Norton permitted her to go and come in his house, and to interfere with her advice between him and his wife, who may first have been indifferent, even friendly, but who soon came to dread and resent this connection with her husband as dangerous and inimical to herself. Indeed this woman was one of the principal causes of the bitter quarrel which at last brought this unhappy marriage to an end. For the mutual good-feeling with which husband and wife had begun the year 1835 was soon over-clouded with fresh misunderstanding. It is impossible to do more than guess at what it was that caused her to wish to leave him again, but it was evidently something more than the physical violence, which seems hitherto to have been her worst complaint against him; something which roused her to an intolerably bitter sense of outrage, and made her own family—while still willing enough to shelter her—decline all further personal relations with him; which made her actually leave her husband's house for her sister's, with the avowed intention, supported by all her family, of never going back to him. She dates this departure vaguely as some time in the early summer. But whatever had been George Norton's treatment of her to drive her to such a step, the taking of it evidently brought him to his senses again. He besieged her with letters, imploring her to return to him. He abased himself before her, declaring himself utterly in the wrong, and ready to make every amends in his power, if she would only have mercy and forgive. His appeal had its usual effect upon her. She had mercy, she forgave him. Against the advice of nearly every friend she had, she went back to him, and never was woman more bitterly punished than she for the unwise generosity of that decision.

Till that moment she had known very little of her husband's pecuniary resources except how much she herself had contributed to them; but on her return, with a view perhaps of urging her to further efforts



Caroline Norton.

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in his behalf, he took her, to a certain extent, into his confidence in this matter. For some time, indeed, he had been in desperate straits for money—such straits, that he seems to have grown indifferent to the means by which he might relieve them. For instance, one of the reasons he advanced to engage his wife's patience towards his kinswoman, Miss Margaret Vaughan, whose interference in his household had already excited her resentment, was that he hoped to get some pecuniary advantage from this lady, both before and after her death. Mrs. Norton discovered, to her astonishment, that even in drawing up her own marriage settlement there had been some deception or concealment, and that he or his lawyers or his elder brother, who was his trustee, had also deceived her mother in the amount of the portion accruing to the younger brothers and sisters of Lord Grantley; consequently he (George Norton) had never possessed the income accredited to him.

She tells how she herself went at last to her father's old friend, the great Whig adviser, Robert Ellice, for advice in these perplexities, and received from him the opinion that if Mr. Norton's embarrassments were to be relieved through her friends, it must be on condition that she, not he, was to have the future management of his affairs. It is hardly likely that husband and wife were agreed on this particular method which she took to help him out of his difficulties. All the old ill-feeling between them was soon revived, and his conduct towards her was such that from sheer despair she fell ill—a long, dreary illness, during which she lost the child which was to have been born to her that autumn—while he went off, as usual, to his sister, Lady Menzies, for the shooting, leaving her so scantily supplied with money for her immediate necessities that, without her brother's assistance, she would have hardly known what to do.

Later in the autumn she herself went away, taking

her three children for a visit to her sister, Lady Seymour, in the country, leaving him alone at Storey's Gate till late in January, while she enjoyed the only happiness she ever could reckon on in her troubled married life, the undisturbed possession of and delight in her little boys—for the very last time, poor woman! if she had only known it. These boys were (as she herself expressed it) "the gleam of happiness and compensation in her life." Her love of all children was one of the most characteristic traits of her nature; her love for her own seems to have called forth the best she had to give.

She describes them one after another, as they came to her, in the verses "The Mother's Heart," first published in 1840:

"When first thou camest, gentle, shy, and fond,  
My eldest-born, first hope, and dearest treasure,  
My heart received thee with a joy beyond  
All that it yet had felt of earthly pleasure;  
Nor thought that any love again might be  
So deep and strong as that I felt for thee.

"Then thou, my merry love, bold in thy glee,  
Under the bough, or by the firelight dancing,  
With thy sweet temper, and thy spirit free,  
Didst come, as restless as a bird's wing glancing;  
Full of a wild and irrepressible mirth,  
Like a young sunbeam to the gladdened earth.

"And thine was many an art to win and bless,  
The cold and stern to joy and fondness warming;  
The coaxing smile, the frequent soft caress,  
The earnest, tearful prayer all wrath disarming.  
Again my heart a new affection found,  
But thought that love with thee had reached its bound.

"At length thou camest, thou the last and least,  
Nicknamed 'The Emperor' by thy laughing brothers,  
Because a haughty spirit swelled thy breast,  
And thou didst seek to rule and sway the others;  
Mingling with every playful infant wile  
A mindful majesty that made us smile.

"Different from both, yet each succeeding claim,  
I, that all other love had been foreswearing,  
Forthwith admitted, equal and the same ;  
Nor injured either, by this love's comparing,  
Nor stole a fraction from the newer call,  
But in the mother's heart found room for all."

These boys were with her as much as her busy life made possible. She drew pictures for them and of them, and wrote them songs and sang to them. Long years after, when they had all ceased to be children, she describes some of these moments together in verses so touching and so little known that I cannot refrain from quoting these few lines from a long poem "To my Piano":

"Sweet wert thou, Music, in the old bright days,  
Ere the home circle was a vanished dream,  
When I sate young, by my own hearth fire's blaze,  
And little children frolicked in its beam.

"Sweet wert thou when I saw those merry feet  
Dance by the firelight on the radiant floor ;  
Restless as motes in sunbeams, and as fleet,  
They clapped their soft small hands and shouted, 'More.'

"While flickering flames laughed out an answering smile  
Upon their glowing cheeks and foreheads fair,  
And threads of gold seemed twined among their curls  
Of tangled and disturbed yet shining hair."

The thought of these children no doubt often protected and steadied her in the many temptations of her married life. For in those days a woman who left her husband, even if after a divorce she was married by her seducer and lived ever after a perfectly respectable life, was seldom permitted to see the children she had borne to her first husband, for a week, a day, an hour even, through the years that might intervene before they grew into independent men and women. Indeed, the women who ran away from their husbands in those days must have been very silly or very desperate creatures, so far more cruel was their

position than that of those women who could manage to keep their lovers and remain only suspected of infidelity to their husbands, as long as these latter did not withdraw their nominal protection.

Soon after Mrs. Norton's return to town from her stay with her sister, Lady Seymour, her eldest boy had been taken ill with scarlatina, "annihilating" all his mother's other engagements for a time, as she explains in one of her little notes to Babbage. But he was better at last, and it was for him especially that she was looking forward to a visit at Frampton Court, the house of her brother Brinsley, to which all the Sheridan connection had been asked for the coming Easter. I prefer to continue this narrative in her own words, written many years later indeed, and in a spirit of bitterness and hard finality, which at the time these events took place she was very far from feeling, yet always the best evidence of what actually took place on this occasion.

"I was then on perfectly friendly terms with Mr. Norton. . . . He had written me while I was at my sister's [Lady Seymour's] at Christmas, urging me to try both with Lord Melbourne and Lord John Russell to get an appointment given to his friend. He never opposed in any way my plans for the Easter holiday, but, on the contrary, urged me, now we were friends, to overrule my brother's objections to receive him, and get him also invited, in which attempt I did not succeed. On the day previous to that on which I was to leave town I returned from my drive and found Miss Vaughan had called in my absence, and remained closeted with my husband for some time. Lord Melbourne was with him when I came in; and they were talking together. After Lord Melbourne left, Mr. Norton talked discontentedly of the appointment, and angrily at my not getting that and other pecuniary interests arranged for him. He also said Miss Vaughan had told him if he himself was not noticed by my brother he ought not to submit to my going to his house with my children. I said nothing should prevent my going

to my brother ; that it was Mr. Norton's own fault he was not on terms with my family ; that the doctor had ordered change of air for the elder child, who was recovering from scarlatina, and that I should give my servants orders to refuse Miss Vaughan admittance to my house, as she laboured always for mischief, in spite of my patience with her. We parted angrily, Mr. Norton to dine with the Chief Magistrate, Sir Frederick Roe, I to dine with Lady Mary Fox.<sup>1</sup> We spent the evening together at a party at Colonel Leicester Stanhope's, and returned home together. The dispute was then renewed whether under the circumstances I should go to my brother's. Mr. Norton's last words were, 'Well, the children shall not ; that I have determined,' and as he entered the house he desired the servant to unpack the carriage (which had been prepared for starting) and take the children's things out, for that they were not going. He then went up to the nursery and repeated the order to the nurse. It was admitted at the trial that the sole observation I made on this occasion when the nurse asked me what she was to do was that Mr. Norton's orders must be obeyed. I neither braved him with useless words nor complained."

But she was not a person to submit meekly to a tyrannical decree—and she was neither calm nor submissive when her maid helped her to dress and let her out of the front door the next morning before seven o'clock, to hurry across the Park in the grey London twilight, to her sister's house in Spring Gardens.

"While I was with my sister, the man-servant (from Storey's Gate) came to me and said that something was going wrong at home—that the children, with their things, had been put into a hackney-coach and taken away, he did not know where. I had the children traced to Miss Vaughan's house, and followed them. Anything like the bitter insolence of this woman—who thought she had baffled and conquered me for life—I never experienced ; she gave vent to the most violent and indecent answers to my reproaches, and

<sup>1</sup> A daughter of William IV. and Mrs. Jordan.

said that if I troubled her further she would give me into the hands of the police."

She did, however, manage to see her children's nurse, and to entreat her to stay with the children as long as she was permitted to do so, whatever else should happen to them. She then went on alone to her brother's place in the country, having already made up her mind never to return to her husband's house. Indeed, the time had come when living together any longer was equally impossible for both of them. If she had returned she would have found the door barred against her—and George Norton's next step to make the breach between them as impassable and public as possible was to advertise her in all the daily papers as having left his roof, and himself as no longer liable for her debts—an action quite unheard of in his class of society, useless from a legal point of view, and an unmerited insult to the woman who was still his wife and the mother of his children, whose name was thus cast to all the scandalous newspapers and gossips of the metropolis to be treated as they would.

The *Age* and the *Satirist*, two of the most scurrilous newspapers of the day, were soon busy at work with the vilest kind of slander and innuendo; not only against Mrs. Norton, but against her sisters, her brothers, her intimate women friends; publishing paragraphs which keep one amazed how their editors were permitted to live from day to day without a horsewhipping from some protector of the women thus assailed by them. But the most ruthless enemies she found anywhere, whether public or private, were the members of her husband's family, especially her husband's elder brother, Lord Grantley.

So active and malevolent was this nobleman's influence to prevent any favourable outcome from his brother's quarrel with his wife, that we are drawn to wonder what conduct of hers could ever have

fostered such a temper towards her. We know him, as he looked in later years, with a great soft beard and that false air of benevolence that goes with a broad, bald brow, in spite of the sensual little eyes underneath; a man whose opinion of a woman's virtue must always have been influenced by his habit of considering any woman as a sort of prey. If there was ever a time when he had admired his beautiful young sister-in-law, it was long in the past. For some years, indeed, he had hardly seen her; and both he and his wife had always shown an indifference, amounting almost to dislike, to their three nephews, one of whom must succeed to the title in absence of children of their own. The brothers had been, in fact, for some time at open variance; but all this was forgotten when George Norton came down to Wonersh Park with his three little boys soon after their mother's attempt to see them at Miss Vaughan's. When he went back to London he left them there safe behind those high brick walls and close-locked gates; and never afterwards did he have a warmer counsellor and abettor than Lord Grantley in every plan he made in his anger to punish his wife for defying his commands.

Lord Melbourne was still at his sister's country place of Panshanger, where he had gone to spend the Easter holiday while these events were taking place in town. Nothing can be more friendly, more affectionate, or less like a guilty lover who fears his guilt on the point of being found out than his almost daily letters to Mrs. Norton during this period.

*"April 6, 1836.*

"I hardly know what to write to you, or what comfort to offer. You know as well as I do, that the best course is to keep yourself tranquil, and not to give way to the feelings of passion which, God knows, are too natural to be easily resisted. This conduct upon his part seems perfectly unaccountable, and, depend upon it, being as you are, in the right, it will

be made ultimately to appear, whatever temporary misrepresentations may prevail. You cannot have better or more affectionate advisers than you have with you upon the spot, who are well acquainted with the circumstances of the case and with the characters of those with whom they have to deal. You know that I have always counselled you to bear everything and remain to the last. I thought it for the best. I am afraid it is no longer possible. Open breaches of this kind are always to be lamented, but you have the consolation that you have done your utmost to stave this extremity off as long as possible."

But any consolation she might have derived from the good opinion of her world in this public discussion of what had long been her private injuries was soon diminished by the vicious attack her husband, with the advice of his brother, Lord Grantley, proceeded to make against her reputation. She had been too widely admired, and, moreover, too imprudent in her conduct not to have laid herself open to suspicion in a thousand ways, if any one wished to take advantage of her.

There was Mr. Trelawny, for instance, the friend of Byron and Shelley, a hero of the late Greek war, a genius, a writer, strikingly handsome, as he is described by Fanny Kemble, who also at one time excited his catholic fancy; "with a countenance habitually serene and occasionally sweet in its expression, but sometimes savage with the fierceness of a wild beast. His speech and movements were slow and indolently gentle, his voice very low and musical, and his utterance deliberate and rather hesitating; he was very tall and powerfully made, and altogether looked like the hero of a wild life of adventure."

Every one could remember how he had admired Mrs. Norton during the past season, how often they had been seen together; it was for compromising evidence with this gentleman among others that Lord

Grantley advised his brother to search among the letters and papers his wife had left behind her in her unpremeditated departure of March 30. She had left everything behind her, even her wearing apparel, when she went away, so far was it from her mind at that time "never to come back." But all search seems to have been unavailing.

Lord Melbourne's next letter to Mrs. Norton was written after the rumour got abroad of these attempts to compromise her.

"April 8, 1836.

"It is vain to rail, otherwise I could do so too: but it was at all times easy to see that it was the most dangerous and ill-conditioned creature possible, and that there was nothing that might not be expected from such a mixture of folly and malignity. I am very glad Charlie is gone down. You have now real friends about you. You describe me very truly when you say that I am always more annoyed than sorry for the persons engaged in it. But, after all, you know you can count upon me. I wonder that you should think it possible that I should communicate your letters to any one else; I have heard no one mention the subject. Lord Holland did, in one of his letters, and I answered him exactly to the effect you told me, as I must have done without being told, namely, that I had seen you with Norton the day before you left town, and that I knew that he was perfectly well acquainted with your intention of going into the country, because he, in my hearing, suggested putting it off from Wednesday, I believe, till Saturday. I have also seen one paragraph relating to the matter in one of the newspapers, and this is all that has reached me. I shall be in town again on Monday. Adieu.

"Yours,  
"MELBOURNE."

He resumes two days later in even greater indignation at the malignant futility which marked this stage of George Norton's proceedings against his wife:

"April 10.

"Never, to be sure, was there such conduct. To set on foot that sort of inquiry without the slightest real ground for it ! But it does not surprise me. I have always known that there was there a mixture of folly and violence which might lead to any absurdity or any injustice. You know so well my opinion that it is unnecessary for me to repeat it. I have always told you that a woman should never part from her husband whilst she can remain with him. This is generally the case; particularly so in such a case as yours, that is, in the case of a young, handsome woman of lively imagination, fond of company and conversation, and whose celebrity and superiority has necessarily created many enemies. Depend upon it, if a reconciliation is feasible there can be no doubt of the prudence of it. It is so evident that it is unnecessary to expatiate upon it. Lord Holland, who is almost the only person who has mentioned the subject to me, is entirely of that opinion.

"Yours,  
"MELBOURNE."

The following letter still contemplates the possibility of a reconciliation.

"SOUTH STREET, April 19, 1836.

"If, for the sake of your children, you think you can endure to return to him, you certainly will act most wisely and prudently for yourself in doing so. I advise you, however, to take no step of yourself without the advice of Seymour and Graham ; and if you determine upon writing to Mr. Barlow, send your letter open to them, giving them a discretionary power either to send or withhold it. Keep up your spirits; agitate yourself as little as possible; do not be too anxious about rumours and the opinion of 'the world'; being, as you are, innocent and in the right, you will in the end bring everything round.

"Yours,  
"MELBOURNE."

But this last letter was in response to one from her in which she herself proposed to return to her husband, if he would receive her. She believed him unfaithful to her ; she knew that he was base, that far from being the injured husband he pretended, he had been far more ready than she ever was to traffic in the admiration excited by her among men who could do him favours ; but he was the father of her three little children, and a return to him seemed the quickest and surest way of making them hers again. She had been parted from them only three weeks, and already the agony of despair sounds through the letter she finally did write and was allowed to send to Mr. Barlow, the clergyman of the little Duke Street chapel where she and her husband went to church. Enough of this letter is quoted by Fitzgerald in his "Lives of the Sheridans" to show how ready she was to make any concession with this end in view.

"She begs him to act as an intercessor, offering every kind of submission or amende that could be desired. If she had made any harsh speeches or declarations that she would not stay with Mr. Norton, she repented. All she asked was a year's trial in his company and that of her children. 'An eternal separation from them will kill me.' While as to the late imputations, she protested her complete innocence, offering piteously, if it pleased him, to admit folly and vanity and thoughtlessness."

Her husband, however, did not want to take her back. He was already too far enveloped in an influence utterly unfriendly to her to show any mercy to her appeal. His answer was the announcement that he was already decided to proceed to the last extremity against her—to divorce her. The first step on the part of the husband in an action for divorce in those days was to bring a civil suit for damages against the man he believed guilty of alienating his wife's affections. George Norton now declared he was

about to bring such a suit, and no one was more struck with amazement and helpless indignation than his own wife when she heard that the person he had pitched upon for co-respondent was his late benefactor and her old friend, the Whig Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne.

Almost any one else he might have chosen with a better show of a real grievance, for jealousy of Lord Melbourne had been the last feeling this friendship of his wife's had ever excited in him. On the contrary, from the first he had done everything in his power to foster their relation with one another. When Lord Melbourne was in the drawing-room, he had been known to deny her to members of her own family. When she was ill the spring after William's birth, and for a long time confined to her room upstairs, George Norton saw no reason why Lord Melbourne should not be admitted to see her there. And even in cases where a husband might justly have interfered, where her reckless disregard for the conventions of society laid her open, perhaps justly, to unfriendly criticism, as when, for instance, she went and saw Lord Melbourne alone at his own house, Mr. Norton often went with her, strolling across the bottom of the Park and leaving her at the official door in Downing Street.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MELBOURNE TRIAL—HER STRUGGLE FOR THE POSSESSION OF HER CHILDREN

THERE is another letter of Mrs. Norton's, written probably just before she received the notice of her husband's new attempt to destroy her reputation ; and though it has nothing directly to do with the matter which must have been absorbing her at that time, I insert it in its chronological order, as an illustration of one of the most beautiful traits of that many-sided character, a quality which never seemed to fall into abeyance, however confused and distracted with misfortune she herself might be—the desire to be of service, to be kind.

It is written to Mrs. Shelley, in answer to a note from the poet's widow, sent after the death of William Godwin, April 7, 1836, before anything but a confused rumour of Mrs. Norton's trouble with her husband had got abroad, asking her to use her influence with the Prime Minister to have the pension of the old philosopher continued to his wife, whose sole support it was. This request was instantly complied with, and the following letter includes Lord Melbourne's reply to it :

*"April 21, 1836.*

"I cannot give Mrs. Godwin any part of her husband's income, because the place is now abolished.

But if Mrs. Shelley will send me the case, I will try if I cannot give her some assistance.

"MELBOURNE."

Mrs. Norton's own letter is as follows :

"FRAMPTON, DORCHESTER,  
*April 21.*

"DEAR MRS. SHELLEY,

"I suppose Lord Melbourne proposes to make the Royal Bounty Fund available in the case of poor Mrs. Godwin, as in others where it has been difficult to arrange what should be done where a pension is impossible. Do not suppose that any worries of my own would ever prevent my doing what I could for any one, far less for you, of whom, though I know comparatively little, I have heard and thought a great deal. I shall be at my brother Brinsley's in Grosvenor Place to-morrow and during the week, so if you wish to address me a line on the subject of your petition to Lord Melbourne, it will find me there. But, indeed, I think you should want no advocate in such a cause, and if you do, there cannot be a better than yourself, the winning frankness of whose manner would please him, as I remember it enchanted me.

"If you see Trelawny, remember me to him, and say that I have executed his wish with more alacrity than he has done mine; and that I wish him to send my sketch-book, etc., to Grosvenor Square, or leave them there himself.

"I know he has many things just now to attend to for other people, so I did not mean it as a reproach. I was glad Lady Dorothy Campbell won her cause<sup>1</sup>; it is an unjust law which makes a mother's claim so vague. I trust your son is well, and in all ways a pleasure and comfort to you.

"Yours very sincerely,  
"CAROLINE NORTON."

Lord Melbourne was able to make the Royal Bounty available for some years at least, and the service rendered at such a time is explanation enough for the exceeding intimacy of the later correspondence

<sup>1</sup> A suit in Chancery for the possession of her children.

between two women who hitherto, as this letter itself declares, had known comparatively little of each other.

One wonders, indeed, whether it does not give the date of an attempt which has passed into tradition in the little village of Wonersh—the tradition that once at least while the children were staying there, their mother came down from London to see them and try to carry them off; that with the help of one of the servants, perhaps, she managed to get through the usually close-barred gates unperceived; that for a moment it almost seemed as if she would succeed in her desperate attempt. The scrap quoted by Fitzgerald among Mrs. Norton's letters to Mrs. Shelley relates as follows:

"I failed. I saw them all; carried Brin to the gate, could not open it, and was afraid they would tear him to pieces, they caught him so fiercely. And the elder one was so frightened he did not follow. It may be a sin, but I do curse them and their dogged brutality. If a strong arm had been with me, I should have done it. I tell you this because I know you have a real wish to know."

A real wish to know, no doubt, and fewer reserves of sympathy than Mrs. Norton's own people, who could have hardly lent themselves to an attempt to kidnap her children without being prepared to meet the penalties of breaking the law of the land in which they lived, the English father's absolute right over his children being unaffected by any claims or wrongs on the part of the mother.

But threatened as she was by the perpetual loss of her boys as well as of her reputation, by the suit her husband was preparing to bring against Lord Melbourne, the situation was almost as serious for the Prime Minister, who saw himself face to face with political ruin if the charges against him could be substantiated. His first letter to Mrs. Norton after the

news had reached him that he was to be the object of George Norton's next attack is anything but complimentary to that gentleman :

“SOUTH STREET, April 23.

“I send you a letter which I wrote yesterday with the intention of sending it. I hope you will not take it ill if I implore you to try at least to be calm under these trials. You know that whatever is alleged (if it be alleged) is utterly false, and what is false can rarely be made to appear true. The steps which it will be prudent to take it will be impossible to determine until we know more certainly the course that is intended to be pursued. If any servant of mine, or any one that has left within the last six years, has been interrogated, I think I should have heard of it. But, whoever may be interrogated, no one can depose anything which can affect you or me.”

But his anxiety on the subject had much to do with the illness, serious enough to be mentioned in all the papers, which overtook him soon after writing this letter. Creevey speaks of it in his diary :

“Melbourne has been very ill, but is better and will do. Young (his secretary) told me that he had been terribly annoyed by the Norton concern. The insanity of men writing letters in such cases is to me incomprehensible. She has plenty of Melbourne's and others, but according to what is considered the best authority, the Solicitor-General of the Tories, Follett, has saved Melbourne, though employed against him. Follett is said to have asked Norton if it was true that he had ever walked with Mrs. Norton to Lord Melbourne's house and then left her there. Upon Norton's saying that it was so, Follett told him there was an end of his action.”

The action did not end here, however. Lord Melbourne's next letter is in answer to a complaint from Mrs. Norton at having to submit to an insulting interview with the solicitor managing his case :

"SOUTH STREET, June 9, 1836.

"I have received your letter, and have given such instruction as I trust will be for the best. I do not wonder at the impression made upon you. I knew it would be so, and therefore I was almost unwilling to have the interview take place at all. All the attorneys I have ever seen have the same manner : hard, cold, incredulous, distrustful, sarcastic, sneering. They are said to be conversant in the worst part of human nature, and with the most discreditable transactions. They have so many falsehoods told them, that they place confidence in none.

"I have sent your note, having read it. I daresay you think me unfeeling ; but I declare that since I first heard I was proceeded against I have suffered more intensely than I ever did in my life. I had neither sleep nor appetite, and I attributed the whole of my illness (at least the severity of it) to the uneasiness of my mind. Now what is this uneasiness for ? Not for my own character, because, as you justly say, the imputation upon me is as nothing. It is not for the political consequences to myself, although I deeply feel the consequences that my indiscretion may bring upon those who are attached to me or follow my fortunes. The real and principal object of my anxiety and solicitude is you, and the situation in which you have been so unjustly placed by the circumstances which have taken place."

The trial came to a hearing on June 22 in a room of the old Westminster Courts of Law, since destroyed to make place for the new Houses of Parliament, the preliminary notice for it having been delayed till the last possible date permitted by the law—so constant was the hope in many quarters that it would finally be settled out of court.

It was tried before Lord Chief Justice Tindal ; Sir William Follett, Solicitor-General for the Peel administration of 1835, being counsel for the plaintiff, while Sir John Campbell,<sup>1</sup> Attorney-General under

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Lord Campbell, and author of "Lives of the Lord Chancellors."

Melbourne, was for the defence, with Sir Frederick Thesiger and Thomas Noon Talfourd, two good Whig barristers, devoted to the administration, as assistant counsel.

There had been great talk beforehand of compromising letters by Lord Melbourne, which were to be produced in evidence against him; but on the day of trial all that appeared were several little notes of the utmost brevity and unimportance. So in the end the case chiefly depended upon witnesses of low character, chiefly servants—a woman who had been discharged by Mrs. Norton for unchastity; a footman who had been discharged by his master for his bad habits. The only respectable person among them was Martha Moore, then under-nurse to the three children, and she had nothing to tell except the mere fact of her mistress's departure from Storey's Gate on March 30. The others either broke down on cross-examination, or made out so weak a case that Sir John Campbell did not even call the witnesses for the defence with which he had come provided. He began his speech for the defence a little after six in the evening, and continued till nearly midnight. The jury pronounced for the defence without leaving the box, and the verdict was received with cheers, which sufficiently showed the temper of the crowded court-room. Indeed the feeling was already on the increase that the whole affair had been a shabby plot conceived by a few enemies of the Government to ruin the Whig Prime Minister; and that the plaintiff's loss of his case was no more than he deserved under the circumstances, while Lord Melbourne's acquittal was really a victory for his party.

Sir John Campbell went immediately after the trial, late as it was, to the Commons, who were sitting, since the burning of the Houses of Parliament, in the crypt of St. Stephen's Church, where he was received with uproarious applause—only from the Whig benches, however. Lord Malmesbury gives a good

specimen of the animus the Tories still showed in the matter when he remarks in his diary that, as far as he could see, the trial had only shown that "Melbourne had had more opportunities than any man ever had before and had made no use of them."

Indeed that was all Sir John Campbell wished or meant to prove. It was none of his business to attack any part of the case against his client which touched only on the reputation of the woman who was just as much its victim. He was not her counsel; indeed the woman in such a case had no counsel, not being a legal party in the suit.

A ridiculous mistake occurs in Clayton's book on Rogers when the author says that the old poet accompanied Mrs. Norton into court on the first day of this trial. She never appeared in court. A letter of hers to Mrs. Shelley, written two days afterwards, tells where she was and what she was doing while her fate thus hung in the balance.

"HAMPTON COURT,  
"Saturday, June 25.

"DEAR MRS. SHELLEY,

"Thank you for writing to me. My friends are very kind, but it is impossible not to feel bitterly the disgusting details of that unhappy trial. You will see, if you have read it, that the girl Eliza Gibson deposes that every day, or generally every day during the months of July, August, and September 1833, I was occupied painting and sinning. In that August my youngest child was born, and during that September I was on the sofa, and when I was able to move I went to Worthing with my children. She says too that Mr. Norton examined her; and he allowed her evidence to be brought forward against me, knowing it not only to be a lie, but a lie which the parish register, or the nurse who sat in the witness-room, could contradict in a moment.

"Well, a woman is made a helpless wretch by these laws of men, or she would be allowed a defence, a counsel, in such an hour. I was in Spring Gardens; I could send notes to disprove the evidence of each

witness, and they were of no use unless they bore on the defendant's case. To go for nothing in a trial which decides one's fate for life is hard. However, it is past, and I am very thankful. I have not heard what is to become of my poor boys; but I am not now obliged to remain inactive, as before. I have been very seriously ill ever since that day and half a night of terrible suspense.

"I can say nothing more at present, therefore I will conclude by thanking you once more for the kind interest you have shown, and promising to send you news of what is settled to be done. I suppose your son is not with you yet. I hope he will always be a pleasure and a pride to you, who have so much of the mother in your heart; and am (stupefied and beat),

"Yours very truly,  
"CAROLINE NORTON."

Mr. Norton having thus failed in his suit for damages, was no longer in a position to continue his action to divorce his wife, and she was equally unable to divorce him because, on returning to him in 1835, a few months before their last quarrel, she had condoned all her husband's worst acts of cruelty and infidelity against her, and was no longer able to bring them up as evidence in her case before the courts.

There was nothing left for them, therefore, but to find some terms for a legal separation. Such separations differed practically very little from a divorce granted by Doctors' Commons, as the ecclesiastical divorce court was sometimes called.

But while the judgment from the ecclesiastical courts could only be obtained at great expense, and on proof of unpardonable guilt on one side or the other, a legal separation could be entered into at will, on the mutual consent of the persons desiring it; was, in fact, nothing more than a sort of legal arrangement by which a wife desirous of living apart from her husband had secured to her, either some part of her own property of which she had lost possession on her marriage (a married woman being by law incapable of

owning property apart from her husband) or if she had no property of her own, an allowance large enough to enable her to subsist independently of her husband, in return for which he was free from liability for any debts she might contract over and above the sum agreed on between them.

But the ecclesiastical courts so entirely disapproved of such arrangements, that the mere fact of some such understanding having once been entered into between two persons, if one of them should afterwards have occasion to plead for divorce, was considered ground enough for refusing it.

There was this further disadvantage in the so-called legal separation that, being an instrument drawn up rather with the idea of circumventing than of being strictly guided by the law which denied independent legal existence to a married woman, it was always a question how far they would be recognised in the civil courts. They were, indeed, agreements made outside the courts, both ecclesiastical and of common law, for without a divorce the former had no right to compel a man to grant a wife an allowance or even a portion of her own property, if she found it necessary to live apart from him, and the latter could only compel him to support her if it could be proved that he had refused to receive her into his house, and that she was entirely without other means of subsistence.

George Norton was a lawyer, and he knew exactly how much and how little the law required of him. His first statement of what he proposed to do in this matter he sent to his wife's brother almost immediately after his wife's departure from his house, and its terms were almost an insult, for he proposed to give her nothing at all—except immunity from his society. As for the rest, her family might support her, or she might earn her living by writing, while he kept the children entirely in his own hands, her access to them being dependent on his good pleasure.

After the trial he was constrained to offer an allowance of £300 a year, still keeping in his hands the possession of all his children.

She wrote entreating that she might be permitted to see them. The youngest was already in town, having been brought up by his nurse when she was called to testify at the trial. This child the mother was permitted to see at her brother's house for half an hour in the presence of his nurse and another of the women witnesses. He was only a baby, hardly more than two years old. He had not seen his mother for more than three months; perhaps he hardly recognised her, so great was the change that had come over her beauty. She had to rush away into another room to struggle with her sobs and tears before she could force herself to the voice and manner which would make him prefer her arms to those of the woman who had so lately given outrageous testimony against her in the witness-box.

But her request to see the other children was granted only on condition she came to the chambers of Mr. Norton's attorney, where they might be brought for half an hour by two of the women witnesses at the trial, who were ordered to remain in the room during the interview. To this proposition was appended a note by his own solicitor:

"Mr. Norton has made the appointment to see the children here. I cannot but regret it."

This offer she refused in a letter to her own legal adviser to be transmitted to her husband.

"However bitter it may be to me, I must decline seeing my children in the manner proposed. I say nothing of the harshness—the inhumanity of telling me I must either see them at the chambers of his solicitor or not at all; but I say it is not decent that the father of those children should force me, their mother, out of the very tenderness I bear them, to visit them at the chambers of the attorney who collected

the evidence, examined the witnesses, and conducted the proceedings for the intended divorce. I say it is not decent—nay, that even if I were guilty, it would not be decent to make me such a proposition. But I am innocent. I have been pronounced and publicly declared innocent by the nobleman against whom that ill-advised action was brought. Why, then, are my children kept from me?—from me whom even their own witnesses proved to be a careful and devoted mother. Mr. Norton says the law gives him my children. I know it does, but the law does no more; it does not compel me to endure more than separation from them; and sooner than allow them to connect my visits in their memory with secrecy and shame, I would submit never again to behold them till they were of an age to visit me without asking the permission of any human being."

Eventually the children were allowed to come to her brother's house in Grosvenor Square—only for half an hour.

She had not sufficiently recovered from the agitation the mere sight of them roused in her to speak to them as well as she could before the two vulgar, curious women, whose presence was a condition of the interview, before the time had elapsed; and in spite of her entreaties for a moment more with them, they were hurriedly taken away.

She met them once by stealth, as they were taking their morning walk in St. James's Park. She tells of this encounter somewhere.

" My eldest, who is seven years old, gave me a little crumpled letter which he said he had had in his pocket a fortnight directed to me, but that none of the servants would put it in the post. He was so dear and intelligent, and listened so attentively to all I said to him, that it was a great, though melancholy satisfaction to have had this interview. I know he will never forget me."

But Miss Vaughan, to whose supervision the boys had again been entrusted by their father, found out this

chance meeting and prevented it ever happening again, by taking them all to drive for some time before she let them out for their daily exercise.

At another time their mother saw them at their own house, when their father was away, boldly knocking at the door, and making her entrance past the servants. But when she attempted it again, the footman, more influenced, no doubt, by the memory of his master's anger than by the desperate woman who was entreating admittance, dropped the chain and roughly shut the door in her face.

Too ill to try again, and hearing that the children were to be removed to Scotland, she sent word by her doctor begging to be allowed only to bid them farewell. To this she was vouchsafed no reply.

"She rose from her sick-bed, and wrapping herself in a cloak, proceeded to the St. Catherine Docks, to the *Royal William* steam vessel, by which she had been informed they were to start. She remained on the deck of the vessel some hours, till it sailed, watching the arrival of passengers on board, but the infants did not appear. Persons having been stationed to watch the other packet, Mrs. Norton learnt that her boys had gone by the *Dundee* in company with Lord Grantley, the only way to find out about them being by inquiry of the steward of the *Dundee* steamship."

She had in the meantime written to her mother-in-law, with whom, till these events, she had always been on terms of affection and confidence—enclosing a note to the eldest child, and conjuring that lady to give it to him. To this no answer was sent.

It was some time, indeed, before she could do more than guess where her boys were. They were finally sent to Loch Rannoch, under the care of their aunt, Lady Menzies, whom the two youngest had never even seen, so long had been the estrangement between the sisters-in-law.

I quote Mrs. Norton's own words on this subject :

"There, with one whom I knew to be haughty and intemperate, those children were left, who had hitherto been so gently and tenderly treated; the eldest of whom was delicate in health, sensitive in disposition, and just recovering from illness. The first step she made in their education was to flog this very child (a child of six) for merely receiving and reading a letter from me (I being in England and he in Scotland), to impress on his memory that he was not to receive letters from me. Having occasion to correct one still younger, she stripped it naked, tied it to the bedpost, and chastised it with a riding whip."

This first separation was only a temporary one, however. In December 1836 Miss Vaughan died, leaving to her cousin George Norton all her Yorkshire estates, with an income of nearly £2,000 a year. On her death, part at least of the strange unfriendly influence which had been driving him to such incredible lengths against an innocent woman—a woman he had once tenderly loved—seemed suddenly to have been removed.

In the spring of the following year Mrs. Norton received a letter from him asking her to come to see him in Miss Vaughan's old house, No. 1, Lower Berkeley Street, then standing empty. This she refused to do, but consented to see him in his own house (he had given up Storey's Gate, and was living at 10, Wilton Place).

There the husband and wife had a long and painful interview, during which he, with perhaps pardonable treachery to his late advisers, confessed that he himself had never believed the charges he had permitted to be brought against her, and that the suit had been urged against his will. He begged her to come back to him; and though she did not immediately consent to this, she did not entirely refuse.

She took immediate advantage of his temporary softening to her, however, to obtain that her children should be sent for from Scotland to be with their father in Wilton Place, and to see them and take them

to drive with her every day. At the same time, she and George Norton also saw and wrote to each other, letters often affectionate on his part, sometimes reiterating his request to her to come back to him ; sometimes discussing conditions, if they should continue to live independently of each other ; and she, in some of her answers, was beguiled into her old spirit of fun and mischief, signing herself "Hannah Moore," the name of a woman whose murder in an empty house, where she had been decoyed for the purpose by the man who made away with her, was one of the sensational incidents of the year. And he acknowledged the sinister suggestion in equally flippant spirit by signing himself "Greenacre"—the name of the woman's murderer—a bit of ill-timed funning of which both of them were afterwards very much ashamed.

Whether she honestly meant to return to her husband to be his wife again without reservation, as he desired, it is difficult to say. A letter written somewhat later to Mrs. Shelley seems to show that she was not quite frank in her promises to him.

"My hope was to come peaceably to an arrangement ; I will not say to outwit him, but to secure the boys. There is no length of desperation or of meanness that one may not be driven to in my situation."

But in the meantime her sister-in-law and former guest, Miss Augusta Norton, had come to stay with her brother in Wilton Place.

I continue the account in Mrs. Norton's own words :

"A dispute followed as to what I had or had not said to this lady. Mr. Norton complained that I had stated to her I did not intend 'honestly' to return to him, but to return for the sake of my children and my reputation, and that I had said 'I never would live with him again.'"

The result was an instant revulsion to all his former violence and suspicion. When she next came to take her children to drive, he himself barred her entrance to them, and pushed her out of the house. She was again denied all access to them; they were again sent back to Scotland. For four years their mother not only never saw them, but seldom even knew where they were. Once when she wrote to ask after them in illness, her letter to the nurse, which contained no syllable of offence, or beyond the subject of her inquiry, was turned inside out and franked back to her. To quote her own words :

"The days and nights of anguish that grew into the struggle of years—it is even now a pain to look back upon : even now the hot agony of resentment and grief rises in my mind when I think of the needless tyranny I endured in this respect."

But from such mischievous tyranny on the part of her husband there was no appeal, because there was no law ; there was hardly any public opinion to interfere with a father's absolute right over his children to the exclusion of their mother, if he chose so to assert it.

That, in the end, after four years of unremitting struggle on her part, she did regain some limited intercourse with her three little boys while they were still children, was because she, single-handed, was able to effect a change in a law so that it would never again be possible for a man like George Norton to vent his spite in this particular way on the woman who was unfortunate enough to be his wife and to have incurred his resentment.

## CHAPTER IX

### EFFORTS TO MAKE HER OWN LIVING—A VOICE FROM THE FACTORIES

AFTER the trial, being utterly without resources of her own—for she had refused her husband's offer of £300 a year without the possession of her children—Mrs. Norton at first took refuge with Mrs. Sheridan at her old home in Hampton Court. No mother could have been more devoted to all her children, more filled with sorrow and sympathy for this one daughter, who would seem to have needed her most. And yet it is hardly likely that two such essentially different natures could have helped each other to bear what was to each, in her way, the greatest humiliation and sorrow of her life.

For Mrs. Sheridan was already tried and trained by sufferings, which she had borne with a grave fortitude and prudence which must have come at last to be the very habit of her mind. It is impossible she could have always understood or approved a passionate, untamed creature like her daughter, who cried and sobbed when she was hurt, who poured herself out in intimate, strong expression when she was deeply moved, who failed at all the points where the mother had been most strong, who would not keep still and let others act for her, and often compromised her own cause by reckless appeals or concessions, or wild attempts to get back or to see her children, just at the

moment when those members of her family to whom the arrangement of her affairs had been entrusted had hoped to wring more favourable terms from her husband in another way.

And she herself was too sensitive to the moods and judgments of those about her not to wince even under tacit disapproval, however little the likelihood of such disapproval withheld her from what she thought best to do. Lord Melbourne's letters to her after the trial show something of the anxiety all her friends must have felt at this time lest she should compromise herself with some course of conduct contrary to what they thought her best interests. The first of these letters is in answer to one from her, to whom he had written in reproach for her complete silence after the trial. He had been afraid that her bitterness against fate had taken the form of anger with him as the chief cause of her misfortune. But she was not capable of such petty resentments. She explained quite simply the cause of her seeming neglect of her old friend, her hopeless wretchedness at the fate of her little children. And then came his reply :

" Well, come what may, I will never again, from silence or any other symptom, think that you can mean anything unkind or averse to me. I have already told you that most of the bitterness which I have felt during this affair was on your account. I don't think your application to Norton was judicious. From the beginning, your anxiety to prevent publicity has induced you to apply to him too much. Every communication elates him and encourages him to persevere in his brutality. You ought to know him better than I do, and must do so. But you seem to me to be hardly aware what a gnome he is, how perfectly earthly and bestial. He is possessed of a devil, and that, the meanest and basest fiend that disgraces the infernal regions. In my opinion, he has made this whole matter subservient to his pecuniary interest. He has got money by it, from Blank, or

some one else. I should feel certain of this if it were not for his folly, which is so excessive as to render him incapable even of forwarding his own designs.

“SOUTH STREET, July 19, 1836.

“There is no knowing what that man may do, now he is left to the guidance of his own feelings and to the advice of those about him. You knew the state of your own domestic affairs better than I did. I only knew what you told me; but it appears to me that by living with him you had grown less alive to his real character by being accustomed to it, and also that you were so used to manage him and to prevent his follies that you relied too much on always being able to do it. Recollect when you were with him how stupidly and brutally he continually behaved: particularly, for instance, to Helen. His conduct there always struck me as showing a violence which was likely afterwards to break out. Now that he has nobody to advise or control or soothe him, what follies or what abominable conduct he may pursue it is impossible to conjecture. I pity you about the children. It is most melancholy not to know where they are or with whom.”

The next letter is a comment on one of the many propositions submitted by her husband's lawyers, in his effort to make her consent to some sort of a settlement in which the children were not included:

“SOUTH STREET, July 24.

“I send you back the copies. I agree very much in all you say in your letter. The amount of allowance makes a great difference. If you could get £300 or £400 (I think you ought to have the latter sum) the arrangement might do tolerably well. But they are very advantageous terms for him, and should not be agreed to except for something approaching to an equivalent. I think he should secure your income beyond his own life upon any property which he may have. I have never mentioned money to you, and I hardly like to do it now; your feelings have been so galled that they have naturally become very sore and sensitive, and I knew how you might take it. I have had at times a great mind to send you some, but I

feared to do so. As I trust we are now upon terms of confidential and affectionate friendship, I venture to say that you have nothing to do but express a wish, and it shall be instantly complied with. I miss you. I miss your society and conversation every day at the hours at which I was accustomed to enjoy them ; and when you say that your place can be easily supplied, you indulge in a little vanity and self-conceit. You know well enough that there is nobody who can fill your place. . . . I saw Brinsley and his wife the other night at Lord Hertford's. I thought him rather cold. None of them seem really glad to see me, except Charlie. But there is no reason they should be. If they went upon my principle, or rather my practice, of disliking those who cause me trouble, uneasiness, vexation, without considering why they do it, they certainly would not rejoice in my presence.

" You are quite right, and it shows your good sense, to bear in mind that it may be of permanent disadvantage to your children to be separated and estranged from their father's family, upon whom they must principally depend. I expect some day or another you will have them all thrown upon you. Adieu.

" Yours,  
" MELBOURNE."

It is not likely that Mrs. Norton accepted the offer of money made in this letter, though it is no less likely that she was in need of it. For even the £50 a year she inherited from her father remained in the hands of her husband, besides all her clothing, jewels, wedding-presents, etc., which she had left behind her, and which her husband had already threatened to sell for the money they would bring him. Brinsley had, indeed, made an offer to pay all his sister's personal debts, on condition that this property was returned to her ; but this offer was refused. She was not, of course, in any danger of actual want. She was one of a large and affectionate family, who would always have protected and supported her in return for a moderate consideration for their wishes. She had a

home with her mother. Some sort of existence was always secure for her in the tranquil privacy of the old place where she had grown up—a peaceful enough shelter from the storm of blame and shame which was beating against her name everywhere else.

She was still at Hampton Court in October 1836, and something of the chastened resignation which would be engendered by the atmosphere of the place seems to breathe through the following letter :

“ HAMPTON COURT, *October 4.*

“ Very cold and very proud would the heart be, dearest Blank, which could take amiss your gentle observations, even were they less stamped with the truth of religion than those made in your last letter. Do not think that I have not already felt their truth from my innermost soul ; and if I have not expressed my convictions, it is partly that mine have been long letters of sorrowful complaint and explanation, and partly that the habits of a worldly life make me reluctant to affirm as my sentiments that which must appear a strong contrast to my actions. Even when living flattered in my own set (that narrow circle of which, I think, Madame de Staël says that they stand around us and hide the rest of the world) I had many things to remind me how very little all the admiration or court which can be paid can make up for unhappiness at home. Many and many a night have I gone out to prove that I could go always to such and such places, and laughed restlessly after I got there, to prove mortification and sorrow could not reach me, when I could have laid my head on my hands and heard no more of what was going on than one hears in the vague murmurs of a waterfall. Many nights, especially in the last year since my great break with my husband, I give you my word that I have been unable to collect myself to answer to the purpose those who addressed me ; and I have felt so irritable at the consciousness that I could not, and so afraid of the sneering smile which I thought I perceived now and then on the faces of my acquaintances, that I have gone away almost immediately after arriving, unfit and unable to go through my evening’s pleasure.

"It is impossible to have felt all this and not also have felt occasionally a remorse for wasted time; and it is against my better thoughts and not my worse that I have had to struggle. I have felt and said to myself: 'Surely this is an irrational, un-Christian, miserable way of passing one's life!' And then again rose Vanity and whispered: 'If you do not go here and there, it will only be supposed you were not asked.' And then the false aims and multitude of small ends to be compassed! Oh, depend on it, there is no treadmill like the life of a woman of the world, and you see it in the expression of the face. It is not late hours that bring that jaded, anxious look; on the contrary, I believe you might sit up till morning singing till the lark interrupted you and be none the worse. It is the perpetual struggle to be and to do, and the internal and continual dissatisfaction with all one is and does, that eats away the freshness of one's life.

"I do not know if you saw the *Keepsake* for this year, and you will, perhaps, think it very ridiculous of me to refer to my own poetry; but I never wrote anything more from my heart than the description written more than a year ago on the print of 'Fashion's Idol' in that book:

"Nor found in all that rabble rout,  
Whose selfish pleasures only cloy,  
One heart that cheered us on in doubt,  
Or in our triumph gave us joy.

"Well, it is over now, and I may well say that I feel the truth of your observations on adversity being good for us, when I tell you that I feel more thankful to God, more conscious how many, many blessings have fallen to my share at this time of sorrow—of the only real sorrow (but one) of my life—than I ever did in the days of my murmuring prosperity.

"I am sure you will be glad to hear that I had news of my children two days since through my widowed sister-in-law,<sup>1</sup> to whom Mr. Norton's youngest sister wrote a long and satisfactory account of them (I hope and think with the intention that it should be com-

<sup>1</sup> This was Mrs. Charles Norton, widowed in 1835, who was Miss Colin Campbell, afterwards the Hon. Mrs. Edmund Phipps.

municated to me). I have written to this sister. The hope of her answering is something to look forward to."

The whole poem from which she quoted is too long to introduce here. Its character is evident enough from the title and the extract she herself has furnished us. But however in poetry she might despise and call by hard names of vanity and folly the instincts that drew her back to her own kind, these were too much a part of her to be long denied. She might for a moment scale philosophic heights from which the sight of averted faces and slights of former friends were matters of indifference to her. But she would have been less herself if she had ever been able to stay there.

Even in seasons of deepest depression and despair she was an essentially social person, who obtained her reactions by mingling with her kind. It was a part of her very self, her wit, her charm, her measure of life, which made the faces of her fellow-creatures so necessary to her. And never for a moment did she let go the favour of the world, which had been so seriously jeopardised by her husband's attack upon her reputation.

We catch a glimpse of her—dressed in pink, with a black lace veil, her hair smooth, with a knot behind, and a string of small pearls across her forehead—at a little dinner in the chambers of the sharp-tongued *Quarterly Reviewer*, Abraham Hayward, in the Temple, where Lord Lyndhurst made them all laugh with his story of a certain old lady who kept her books in detached book-cases, the male authors in one and the female in another, because she did not wish to add to her library. And this in May 1836, when all the world was ringing with George Norton's intention to destroy his wife's honour by his suit against Lord Melbourne.

When her host of that night saw her again, at the

end of the same year, however, he was forced to exclaim how thin and pale she had grown in the interval ; but she had not lost her power to attract and amuse, or her need to exercise it.

The life at Hampton Court, with its intolerable memories and its sad restraints, had already become impossible for her, and she had broken away to make her home with her half-uncle, Mr. Charles Sheridan, at 16, Green Street, afterwards in Bolton Street, Mayfair. It is about this gentleman that Rogers used to tell the funny little story to his own disadvantage. They were playing forfeits, and Miss Sheridan—it was before her marriage—was condemned to kiss her uncle Charles. “Of course I did it willingly,” she says. “And if it had been me?” hinted Rogers. “Oh, then I should have done it cheerfully!”

There had been a very close and warm relation between this uncle and his widowed sister-in-law and her little children, ever since her husband’s death brought Mrs. Sheridan back to England to make her home in Hampton Court. And of all these nieces and nephews, Caroline was perhaps his favourite. But though possessed of ample means for his own necessities, he was not a rich man, nor would she have been satisfied to live in entire dependence on him under any circumstances. The house they took together in Green Street was hers as well as his, and she was already hard at work to find the means to pay for it.

When she left her husband she was engaged on a long poem, the manuscript of which was among the few papers she managed to regain possession of with the help of her brother Charles, whom she sent to get them from a little desk in her own drawing-room a few days after her flight. This poem she had finished and revised in the interval of her anguish during that miserable summer, and it had already found a publisher by October 1.

There is a certain noble appropriateness to the

finer side of her nature, that the work she was able to finish at such a time was the first of those appeals to the public to better the conditions of the wretched little creatures employed in factories, of which Mrs. Browning's "Cry of the Children," written seven years later, is the most beautiful example.

John Murray, of Albemarle Street, accepted the poem (a long, rather dreary affair in the Byronic stanza), less perhaps from its merits—it is the least interesting, the least poetic piece of work she ever achieved—than from its appositeness to the spirit of the times; for the year 1836 was a time of great mass meetings, vigorous investigation of the condition of child-labour in the factories, largely the result of a Bill introduced into Parliament in 1833 and warmly supported by Lord Ashley, or, as he is better known, the Earl of Shaftesbury, just entered upon that life-work of philanthropy which gives him such a claim to the gratitude of his countrymen. Lady Ashley was before her marriage Lady Emily Cowper, a contemporary and rival beauty of Georgiana, youngest of the three Sheridan's. Her mother, afterwards Lady Palmerston, was Lord Melbourne's only sister. A younger sister of Lady Ashley, Lady Fanny Cowper, afterwards married to Lord Jocelyn, was also a noted beauty in her day.

Mrs. Norton's answer to Murray's acceptance of her poem is as follows :

"HAMPTON COURT PALACE,  
"October 7, 1836.

"I thank you for the promptitude with which you have replied to me, nor do I wish to express my disappointment at the terms on which you propose to print my little poem, having long since found out how very common the degree of literary talent is, of which I used to be so vain, and therefore no longer looking on either verse or prose as a heap of uncoined gold. I feel besides assured that after my confession of the disagreeable position I am in, you would act as liberally to me as circumstances would admit; I do not

therefore fear anything on that score. . . . There is, I believe, no question but that I might publish my brief effort perhaps in one sense more advantageously among the set of publishers who do not even ask to see a book, but pay you for it because it is yours ; but it is a wish, a vanity of mine, to be published by you. You know it is for the third time I have endeavoured to appear under your auspices. I have sometimes thought that friends of yours who are not friends of mine have thwarted me in this particular.

"If you will publish my little poem immediately, I shall be too happy to send it to Albemarle Street again without disputing terms ; and as for my anonymous character, if the poem has any success at all, I do not wish to preserve it very strictly. I only wish not to look my readers full in the face on my first introduction to them. My name has been (God knows) before the public long enough to make me hate the letters which compose the word. I have a slight shrinking from avowing even so light a treatment of a political subject ; and my treatment of it, such as it is, is against the opinion of some whom I respect and value amongst my friends. Are not Lord Ashley's, Mr. Murray's, and its own name enough ? If not, I am sure the addition of mine would not float it after the launch. . . .

"You ought to encourage me, for you never gave any advice more faithfully followed than that which you offered when I was ambitious you should publish my 'Undying One' : not to attempt strained and unnatural subjects. My 'Voice from the Factories' is in the style you bid me adhere to, and I will still hope that you will take me under your charge."

The person she hints at as unfriendly to her is Lockhart, afterwards one of her very good friends. The next letter to Mr. Murray shows clearly that it was he whom she meant.

" 16, GREEN STREET, October 19, 1836.

" DEAR SIR,

"Owing to my absence from Hampton Court, I have only received the proofs this evening, and return them to you, hoping that you will kindly hasten the

printing, in the form decided upon, as I wish to see it completed before I leave town for Dorsetshire.

"I trust dining with Adam Blair (a nickname for Lockhart) did not make you 'catch a dislike to me,' as poor Douglas Kinnaird<sup>1</sup> once told me he did, after he had dined with some friends of his who were not friends of mine. He was very cross, and when I tried to coax him out of it he said: 'The fact is, I caught cold last night where I dined, there was such a draft of air; and I also caught a dislike to you, there was so much abuse and fault-finding.'

"Praying that you may be kept from such sickness,

"Believe me, dear sir,

"Yours truly,

"C. E. NORTON."

She was very anxious that her poem should appear before the publication of a serious article on the same subject contemplated about the same time by the *Quarterly*. But the delays it suffered on its way through the press were often of her own making, and, indeed, sufficiently characteristic.

She did not like the size of the page first submitted to her. "I think it too small. The first little poem I printed was in that type and of that size, and nothing could look worse than it did when bound up."

Then she did not have a single book at that moment in her house (her new house with her uncle in Green Street), so she must wait another day till she could avail herself of Mr. Murray's suggestion, and choose a pattern from his shelves of the size she wished.

Then there were mistakes in sending the proof. "The foolish Irish woman who has the care of my house never forwarded the papers you sent there. She has not yet been long enough with me to know of what consequence letters and papers are in my eyes, so she very innocently wrote me word that 'Mr. Murray had sent some very heavy letters and parcels. What will I do with them?'"

<sup>1</sup> A brother of Lord Kinnaird (her father's old friend), a banker in Westminster, who died 1830.

The poem finally appeared late in November, under the not very attractive name, "A Voice from the Factories"; and she received enough from the sales to give her a certain confidence in the future—at least, that part of the future which depended on her own powers to make her daily bread. But both present and future must often have seemed unspeakably dreary and hopeless during that first winter alone with her uncle, without her little children. It is during that winter of 1836-7 that we begin to hear about the ravages of that exceedingly modern plague, influenza; and she was ill for a long time. There are some verses of hers, published three years later, which seem to apply especially to that period of painful inaction :

"I was alone, but not asleep ;  
Too weary and too weak to weep ;  
My eyes had closed in sadness there,  
And they who watched o'er my despair  
Had placed that dim light in the room,  
And deepened the surrounding gloom  
By curtaining out the few sad rays  
Which made things present to my gaze :  
All, all because they vainly thought  
At last the night its rest had brought—  
Alas ! rest came no more to me,  
So heavy was my misery !

"And while I darkly rested there,  
The breath of a young child's floating hair,  
Perfumed, and warm, and glistening bright,  
Swept past me in the shrouding night ;  
And the footsteps of children, light and quick  
(While my heart beat loud, and my breath came thick),  
Went to and fro on the silent floor :  
And the lock was turned in the fastened door  
As a child may turn it, who tiptoe stands  
With his fair round arms and his dimpled hands,  
Putting out all their strength in vain  
Admittance by his own means to gain :  
Till his sweet, impatient voice is heard  
Like the chirp of a young imprisoned bird,  
Seeking an entrance still to win  
By fond petitions to those within.

"A child's soft, shadowy hair, bright smiles,  
 His merry laugh and coaxing wiles,  
 These are sweet things—most precious things—  
 But in spite of my brain's wild wanderings,  
 I knew that they dwelt in my fancy only,  
 And that I was sad, and left, and lonely ;  
 And the fear of a dreadful madness came  
 And withered my soul like a parching flame ;  
 And I felt the strong delirium growing,  
 And the thread of my feeble senses going ;  
 And I heard with a horror all untold,  
 Which turned my hot blood icy cold,  
 Those light steps draw more near my bed ;  
 And by visions I was visited  
 Of the gentle eyes which I might not see,  
 And the faces that were so far from me !

"And blest, oh, blest ! was the morning beam  
 Which woke me up from my fever-dream !"

And yet it was that same winter that we hear of her return into general society from Lord Malmesbury.

"Mrs. Norton made her *début* a few nights ago, and was very well received. Her reception had been made a party question ; indeed, the whole business has been."

We hear of her, too, riding in the Park or driving to Richmond with her uncle or her sisters, going out with them in the evening, and herself giving little dinners at her own house. Yet she never really resigned herself to her new situation. Long years afterwards, in reply to a taunt of her husband's that, in spite of her contemptuous abuse of him, she was always ready enough to renew friendly relations with him, she breaks out :

"My husband is welcome to the triumph of knowing that, especially during the first four years of our separation, I often wavered and wept ; that pride and bitter anger have not always been uppermost ; that there have been hundreds of dreary evenings and hopeless mornings, when even his home seemed to

me better than no home—even his protection better than no protection—and all the thorns that can cumber a woman's natural destiny, better than the unnatural position of a separated wife. He is welcome to the triumph of knowing that it is impossible to have felt more keenly than I did the confused degradation of that position. I was too unlike his picture of me to be otherwise than often miserable; often willing to make a raft out of the wreck, and so drift back, even to a comfortless haven. There were moments, too, when I pitied him; when I believed his story of loneliness and repentance."

It was in this spirit she met him when he came back to her after Miss Vaughan's death, when she consented to see him and treat with him during the summer while he wrote the "Greenacre Letters." I have already told how entirely the hopes excited by those letters were deceived and betrayed. She was very near despair when she wrote the following to John Murray, which I give to show the endless contrasts of that brilliant, many-sided nature, as well as for its characteristic wording and opinions.

#### THE HONOURABLE MRS. NORTON TO JOHN MURRAY

"November 4, 1837.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have received 'Don Juan,' and the October *Quarterly*. In thanking you for the two volumes of Byron belonging to the present beautiful edition, I must tell you that I had never read 'Don Juan' through before, which very few women of my age in England could say, and which I do not mind owning, since it adds greatly to the pleasure with which I perused the poem. I am afraid, in spite of the beauty, the wit, and the originality of the work, I think with Guiccioli—'Mi rincrese solo che Don Giovanni non resti, al inferno.' It is a book which no woman will ever like; whether for the reasons given by the author, or on other accounts, I will not dispute. To me the effect is like hearing some sweet and touching melody familiar to me as having been sung by a lost friend and

companion, suddenly struck up in quick time with all the words parodied.

"I am in town for a short time, and occupied with lawyers and law—as usual. I used to boast of my partiality for the Bar as a profession, but I begin to think it would be pleasanter to follow a marching regiment than to see the seamy side of this intellectual trade. Who has sprung up as Mrs. Norton in *Bentley's Miscellany*? It is pretty cool, of the lady taking the name and title of my husband's wife, and I do not much like the mistake, as I have been too ill to write for those to whom I was bound by the bond of hire.

"Yours ever,

"CAROLINE NORTON."

## CHAPTER X

### THE ENGLISH LAW—ACCESSION OF QUEEN VICTORIA

THE lawyers and law matters mentioned at the end of the last chapter relate to a very worthy attempt of Sir John Bayley, George Norton's chief legal adviser, to make some kind of terms between husband and wife to which they would both consent.

Sir John Bayley had heard of the case only from his client, and was thoroughly prejudiced against Mrs. Norton, whom he had already judged as a vain and frivolous woman, guilty, even if not actually convicted of the grossest infidelity against her husband, who wanted a large allowance, that she "might dash about to fashionable parties," and the possession of her children, that she might save her reputation with the world. In all earlier discussion of this subject of settlement, he had urged his client to stand firm against any more favourable conditions than those already proposed, especially those concerning the possession of the children.

"For," as he remarks in a letter to George Norton's solicitor on this subject, "I feel confident that no court of equity would ever enforce her having access to them as long as Mr. Norton is alive and forbids it; and my advice to Mr. Norton is to resist most strenuously every attempt of the kind."

There is another letter from Sir John Bayley stating

the conditions on which he enters upon his new duty :

"Some time in the autumn of 1837, I, at Mr. Norton's own earnest solicitation, took upon myself the arduous and thankless task of arbitrator, providing that Mrs. Norton would permit me to act in that capacity on her behalf. I did not expect that she would ever consent to do this, from the position I had held as counsel for her husband, and the impression she necessarily must have entertained that I was prejudiced against her. To her honour and credit, however, she at once acceded to Mr. Norton's side of the request. I received from both her and her husband written assurances that both would abide by my decision whatever it might be; and on these terms I entered on my difficult task."

He came, and at his first interview with her found occasion to change his preconceived opinion to one much more favourable.

"My husband," said Mrs. Norton many years later, "is fond of paying me the melancholy compliment that to my personal charms, and not to the justice of my cause, I owed it that all concerned in these wretched affairs took my part against him as soon as they had an explanation with me. Now, it would certainly have been strictly probable that any man, especially a man of Sir John Bayley's nature—blunt, kindly, and vehement—would, on finding, instead of the painted wanton he expected to find, prepared to struggle for her rights and her interests, a miserable, sobbing, worn-out young woman, appealing to him for nothing but the mercy of getting back her children (those dear children, the loss of whose pattering steps and sweet, occasional voices made the silence of her new home intolerable as the anguish of death); I say it is conceivable that being but a man, and not the angel of justice, he might have leaned unduly and compassionately to the person whose bitter grief and single simple stipulation came on him as a surprise; and that so he might not have dealt as impartially as good faith with Mr. Norton required."

She goes on, however, with characteristic vehemence, to prove that it was not so ; that Sir John Bayley's consideration for her was to be attributed not to pity, not to friendship, but to mere justice ; but perhaps a more satisfactory evidence in this respect is a letter from Sir John Bayley himself, which appeared some years later in the *Times* in answer to an accusation of bad faith against him by his former client.

"I found Mrs. Norton anxious only on one point, and nearly heart-broken about it ; namely, the restoration of her children. She treated her pecuniary affairs as a matter of perfect indifference, and left me to arrange them with Mr. Norton as I thought fit. I found her husband, on the contrary, anxious only about the pecuniary part of the arrangement, and so obviously making the love of the mother for her offspring a means of barter and bargain, that I wrote to him I could be no party to any arrangement which made money the price of Mrs. Norton's fair and honourable access to her children. I found his history of her expenses and extravagance to be untrue. I found, under Mr. Norton's own handwriting, confessions of the grossest personal violence towards his wife. I wrote to him to say that, in spite of these injuries, I found Mrs. Norton 'reasonable,' 'tractable,' 'very forbearing indeed, in her expressions towards him,' anxious to satisfy him 'for the children's sake'; writing to me instead of abusing him, that she desired 'heartily, vainly, and sorrowfully, to be at peace with her children's father.' I found that the taking away of these children had been the real cause of the quarrel, and that, not only Mr. Norton threw the blame of the subsequent trial on his advisors and declared that the trial had been brought on against his judgment, but that one of his angriest grounds of complaint against his wife was that she had said that she never would return to him. I read with amazement the series of letters which Mr. Norton had previously addressed to his wife, and in which he signs himself 'Greenacre.' I showed these letters to Lord Wynford.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Tory peer, George Norton's former guardian. Present at the trial of Lord Melbourne, and suspected of having had a good deal to do with collecting the evidence on which the prosecution of that nobleman rested.

I said if Mrs. Norton had been my sister I would have made them public; and I consider she showed forbearance and consideration in not making them public. Mr. Norton admitted to me his firm belief of his wife's innocence of the charge he had brought against her and Lord Melbourne; and these letters of his expressly exculpated her from blame, and endearingly entreated her to return and live with him again. I then changed my opinion. I thought Mr. Norton had done his wife the most cruel injury a man could inflict, and that he was bound to make every sacrifice and reparation in his power. I saw no earthly reason why her children should be withheld from her, and required him to write immediately to Scotland, where the children then were, to have them sent to London forthwith. In my presence and at my direction he wrote a letter to that effect and sealed it. I posted it myself, and thought all was settled, as the sole stipulation made by Mrs. Norton was the return of her children; but Mr. Norton was base enough to write a second letter, unknown to me, to forbid their coming; and come they did not. As soon as I discovered this act of treachery and breach of faith, I threw up my office as mediator. I remonstrated in severe terms with Mr. Norton, and my intercourse with him ceased.

"I deem it, however, the simplest justice to Mrs. Norton to say that I found her frank and straightforward throughout, acting strictly up to this sentence in her first letter to me, 'Heartily, and as God is my judge, I desire to make what peace is possible between me and my husband, in spite of the past.' She left her interests entirely in my hands; threw no obstacle in my path, and never once swerved from the promise to abide by whatever terms I should lay down. With Mr. Norton (though he had appointed me to act) I found the exact reverse. He abused his wife and his wife's family; he shuffled about the misstatements he could not deny; he would be bound neither by his verbal promise nor his written pledge; and after a correspondence, begun in November, which did not end till January, all effort at arrangement was given up.

"The question of Mrs. Norton's allowance was not

entered upon, as my interference terminated at this point."

To complete this part of the story, Mr. Norton continued to withhold from his wife any allowance for support while she continued to live separated from him, until the summer of 1838, when certain creditors whom he would not, and she could not pay, decided to carry the matter into the common courts and sue George Norton for what his wife owed them; for the same law which took away a woman's independent existence on her marriage gave her at least this advantage. Being legally non-existent, no one could sue her for any debt she might contract with trusting tradespeople; nor had her creditors any legal means of recovering directly from her. Her husband was, however, liable for her debts, if it could be proved that he had left her without adequate means of support, or that she had refused to live with him.

George Norton, being himself a lawyer, was perfectly aware of the weakness of his position before the law. It was for this reason he was so anxious to force his wife into acceptance of the sum he was willing to give her, which, by the way, he always made dependent on the condition that he should be no longer liable for her debts, whether contracted in the past or in time to come. The clause including the past was as important as the condition about the future; for in those days accounts might run on without a settlement for a dozen years or more. In fact, prompt payment, even by rich people, was rather the exception than the rule, and tradespeople were accustomed to get what they could, when they could, and present a bill at the time when it was most likely to be acceptable, rather than at the time it was due.

As long as there was no legal arrangement of separation between George Norton and his wife, he was always subject to this inconvenience from his wife's creditors, and always struggling to evade it,

even to the extent of advertising her in the public papers, which he did three separate times: immediately after she left him, and again in the summer of 1837, when fresh disagreement had put a stop to the half-concluded reconciliation between them, and again in May 1838:

"Whereas on March 30, 1836, my wife, Caroline Elizabeth Sarah, left me, her family, and home, and hath from thenceforth continued to live separate and apart from me," etc.

Hayward remarks in a letter to his sister, May 23, 1838 :

"You have seen, I suppose, Norton's advertisement that his wife is not to be trusted: a useless insult, as he would not be liable if he made her a proper allowance."

A gratuitous insult, one would think, for he had been assured by his lawyers that such a notice was perfectly useless from a legal point of view. We can understand the complications in Mrs. Norton's position better when we learn that one of the bills she refused to pay was for jewellery, an account extending from 1833 to 1837, and for articles which were at that moment in her husband's possession. This and several smaller suits were settled out of court, but one suit did come up for a public hearing.

It was a bill for £142, which had been running for about a year, from March 1837 to January 1838, at a livery stable where she had been in the habit of hiring cabs and horses before and after her separation from her husband. The particular expense which made the bill so large, however, was for a small phaeton, which she used when driving with her three little boys for the few weeks in the summer when she was permitted to see them during her partial reconciliation with her husband.

The case was tried before Lord Abinger, a personal friend of Lord Wynford. Theoretically, of course, Mrs. Norton was not a party to the suit, and therefore not involved in the evidence; but as the validity of the creditor's claims depended on the relations in which husband and wife stood while the debt was being contracted, a certain amount of very personal evidence was brought into court.

Indeed, there seems to have been an effort on the part of some of Mrs. Norton's advisers to use this trial as an opportunity for clearing her name, which that earlier action against Lord Melbourne had by no means afforded. For this purpose Sir John Bayley, called as a witness by the creditor, made repeated efforts to get George Norton's own correspondence with his wife in 1837 brought into evidence, with its declarations of his (Mr. Norton's) entire belief of his wife's innocence. But the lawyer for the defence, Sir Fitzroy Kelly, was always successful in keeping it out, on one technicality after another.

Lord Abinger also took occasion in his summing-up to reproach this same vehement gentleman, Sir John Bayley, for even trying to introduce information, which he could only have obtained as George Norton's legal adviser and the arbitrator in his affairs with his wife. Mrs. Norton was also indirectly criticised as having so far identified herself with the case against her husband as to have furnished the plaintiff with private letters and papers which went far to prove George Norton's liability for her debts. She certainly did furnish such papers, and it is difficult to see why she should be blamed for doing so, since it was the only way the law allowed her for getting her own difficulties decided. And the fact that she was so blamed added only another exasperation to a situation already sufficiently painful. She angrily resolved to justify herself by publishing the whole account of her case from the beginning, including the evidence suppressed by Lord Abinger, and was restrained from

so doing only by the entreaty of Lord Melbourne, for reasons best given in her own words :

" It so happened that this petty cause—pleaded by Sir Fitzroy Kelly and decided by Lord Abinger, in which nothing more important than a woman's fame and a woman's interests were at stake—was tried at the exact moment (June 1838) when, in the first year of a young queen's reign, the Whig Government was overwhelmed with business even more troublesome than that which the cares of office usually involve. What was my poor destiny in a session in which a new coinage and a coronation, the revolts in Canada, the attempt to repeal the Corn Laws, the conduct of O'Connell, the King of Hanover's claim for his English income, the Irish Church Bill, the first general arrangements of mails by railroad, the visit of Marshal Soult, the creation of a new batch of Peers, the passing of the Irish Poor Law, and a hundred other subjects of varying importance, employed Lord Melbourne's attention ? What could my sobbing, moaning, and complaining be but a bore to this man who was not my lover ? What could my passionate printed justification be but a plague and embarrassment to him, already justified and on the pinnacle of fortune ? Let no one say Lord Melbourne's family should not hold me in kind remembrance : for then, young, childless, defamed, sorrowful, and rash, there never was the day that I rebelled against his advice or gave him annoyance that I could possibly avoid. I did not even persist : ' This can only be a temporary embarrassment by revival of painful gossip to you ; it is my life, my future, the strongest temptation of my heart to justify myself.' "

" I listened then, as at other times, to the ever-ready argument that I would be justified without these means ; that they would be beyond measure vexatious and embarrassing to him ; that I might ' rest assured ' that no patience I showed would be forgotten, either by him or those above him. I gave up what I had prepared."

She responded, as she always did, as far as was in the power of that impulsive, imprudent nature, to an

appeal to generosity or affection, though this particular appeal was at a time when the old friendship it acknowledged had come to be a very barren thing. For the death of William IV. and the accession of a young, inexperienced woman to the throne of Great Britain had wonderfully changed the position of the once unpopular Prime Minister, and Lord Melbourne's absorption in his new duties was the general talk of the hour.

It was not only a natural zeal to acquit himself well in a difficult and delicate situation, but a very real and close friendship which had sprung up between the girl of seventeen and the gallant old statesman of fifty-eight. To quote Charles Greville on the subject:

"I have no doubt he is passionately fond of her [the Queen], as he might be of his daughter, if he had one, and the more because he is a man with a capacity for loving without having anything in the world to love."

Nor was this affection in any degree one-sided. The Queen herself admired and loved and trusted the man with whom she was brought into such continual intercourse.

"She really has nothing to do with anybody but Melbourne," Greville goes on; "and with him she passes more hours than any two people in any relation of life perhaps ever do pass together. At eleven or twelve every morning he comes to her and stays an hour. At two she rides, Melbourne always at her left hand, and the equerry-in-waiting on her right. She rides for two hours along the road, for the greater time at full gallop. Dinner at 7.30, but she seldom appears till eight. Let who will be there, Melbourne always sits next her, and evidently by arrangement, because he always takes in the lady-in-waiting, who must sit next but one to the Queen. In the drawing-room the Queen sits at a large round table, her guests around it, and Melbourne always in a chair at her left, remaining there without moving while two mortal hours are

consumed in such conversation as can be found, which appears, and really is, very uphill work.

"But interesting as his position is, and flattered, gratified, and touched as he must be by the confiding devotion with which she places herself in his hands, it is still marvellous that he should be able to overcome the force of habit so completely as to endure the life he leads. Month after month he remains at the Castle, submitting to the daily routine. Of all men he appeared to be the least likely to be broken into the trammels of a court, and never was there such a revolution seen in anybody's occupations and habits. Instead of indolently sprawling in all the attitudes of luxurious ease, he is always sitting bolt upright; his free-and-easy language, interlarded with damns, is carefully guarded and regulated with the strictest propriety, and he has exchanged the good talk of Holland House for the trivial, laboured, and wearisome inanities of the Royal circle."

All those closely connected with Lord Melbourne, and accustomed to count on his society, must have lost by this readjustment of all his habits around a new centre; but the friend whose old relations with him most resembled the new may be supposed to have lost the most. Indeed, the surprise which Greville shows at seeing his old acquaintance so changed and tamed to the dull conventions of Windsor must have been stronger still in Mrs. Norton, as in any other woman before or after her, when she sees the man she was so proud to have held by the charms of her conversation so easily satisfied with so much less.

It must also have been a strange experience for her to find the same quality of friendship which had met with such contemptuous disbelief or suspicion in her own case, so justly and fairly regarded when seen in a royal setting; and the man whose name had been coupled so lately with hers, in a very pillory of shame, admitted to be the closest and most honoured adviser of a pure young girl, while she herself was not received at Court again, by Lord Melbourne's own advice, as

long as the Queen remained unmarried. There were times when the cruel contrasts in it all made her break out into a sort of cry :

" Why am I hunted and haunted through life with a scandal involving two persons, but seemingly admitting of but one acquittal ? "

On the whole, however, she submitted to the obvious necessity of a woman to bear, in matters like this, the greater share of blame. She submitted to Lord Melbourne's request that she would make no public attempt to clear her name of the scandals which still besmirched it. On one point alone she refused to remain passive. She knew it was the law of England which had taken her children from her. Very well then ; that law must be changed, or if that was beyond her power, at least known through the length and breadth of the land in its whole iniquity.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE INFANT CUSTODY BILL

THE first resource of a woman like Caroline Norton, suffering under what she felt to be an intolerable wrong arising from an anomaly of conditions which cried out for investigation and reform, was her pen. And, indeed, it was to her pen that she instantly turned, "looking to it" (I quote her own words) "to extricate me, as the soldier trusts to his sword to cut his way through."

Even in the autumn of 1836, immediately after her separation from her husband, while she was bargaining with Murray for the sale of her poem, "A Voice from the Factories," she was already at work on a prose pamphlet on the subject always closest to her heart, "The Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Children as affected by the Common Law Right of the Father." She was not so utterly unequipped as most women for work of this semi-legal character, for she had often amused herself in the past among her husband's law-books, and drawn from them enough at least to show a woman as clever as she was the way to turn the slight taste she always had for such subjects into a really serious study and support.

The real difficulty lay in getting any one to publish what she might produce in this new departure. All her usual outlets, the pages of annuals and fashionable

journals, were of course completely useless to her for such a purpose as she contemplated, and it was equally impossible to get any publisher to handle what might so easily in her hands become distinctly compromising matter.

She first applied to Murray, who consented at least to read and criticise her manuscript, though without much encouragement otherwise. To Murray she accordingly sent it with the following letter:

“FRAMPTON COURT, *December.*

“DEAR SIR,

“I very hastily enclose my ‘Observations, etc.,’ to you. The cases are wanting in the middle, because I have been so ill. I have not yet finished copying them familiarly from the legal reports; but you have all the work which needs to show you the style and intention. My brother Charles forwarded me your answer, which is the reason I send it to you thus imperfect, as it saves me time in case you still think it a publication to decline undertaking for me. I shall then print it at my own expense at Ridgway’s, or try my old friends Saunders & Otley, as I am obstinate in determining it shall appear. I will thankfully receive any suggestions for alterations or omissions you think ought to be made. Pray show it to no one. I have told Mr. Hayward I will send it to him in proof; I have also, on his advice, omitted any personal attack on Lord Wynford, which I think I might justly and safely have done. However, I have enemies enough and bitter enough already, so it is as well.

“Will you return it soon with your opinion? Will you tell me the probable expense of printing it, if I do that, and any other thing which your experience suggests on the subject?”

Mr. Murray’s opinion was so full of caution and criticism that she hastily resolved, rather than submit to the pruning that he suggested, to have the tract printed and circulated privately at her own expense.

She wrote to him accordingly as follows :

“MAIDEN BRADLEY, MERE, WILTS”  
[Lord Seymour’s place in Wiltshire],  
“December 24.

“DEAR SIR,

“I have this moment received your letter, for which and for the hints contained in it many thanks. I wrote to my brother to call and know your decision ; I have written to him again to-day. What I will do is this : I will make Ridgway print 100 copies for private (!) circulation ; and then I will take a little time and a good deal of counsel as to what shall be struck out in publishing on the subject. Mr. Hayward said he would ‘support it’ in his January magazine ;<sup>1</sup> but he has not yet seen it. I will set it up in slips and send it so to him. I can then send the printed copies to friends and members of Parliament ; I do not think I am an obstinate, and certainly not a touchy, author, as regards mere authorship—that is, I am not mortified or disturbed at passages being objected to and cut out, but I shall be beyond measure vexed and disappointed if the fear of prosecution prevents its being published. Can no one be made responsible for it instead of the publisher—one of my brothers, for instance ? Am I not responsible ? Tell me this, or inform Charles if you find time to see him ; and let the MS. come to me through Downing Street, with ‘Immediate’ upon it. I will not trouble you farther on the subject at present. I consider the publication in some way, modified or not, as a necessity, and I should not care if my pamphlet were forgot the next day, if some one would follow better able to treat it, and who would treat it with the same views.”

A more intimate history of this pamphlet, and of the purpose for which she was especially preparing it, is found in the following correspondence with Mrs. Shelley, already published by Fitzgerald in his “Lives of the Sheridans” :

“MAIDEN BRADLEY.

“I have suffered, and do suffer so much mentally and bodily, that I regret I ever allowed the children

<sup>1</sup> *The Quarterly Review of Jurisprudence*, edited for many years by Abraham Hayward.

to go out of my reach : though taking them would have entailed the necessity of leaving all my own people and living abroad. I am about to publish 'Observations on the Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Young Children,' in which, among other cases, I have given my own. I think there is too much fear of publicity about women ; it is reckoned such a crime to be accused, and such a disgrace, that they wish nothing better than to hide themselves and say no more about it. I think it is high time that law was known, at least among the weaker sex, which gives no right to one's own flesh and blood ; and I shall follow that with 'A Comparison between the English and Scotch Law of Divorce,' as affecting the possibility of defence on the part of woman.

"This occupies my restlessness, which is very great, and of that painful, hopeless sort, with no aim or object."

"MAIDEN BRADLEY, January 5.

"DEAR MRS. SHELLEY,

"I have been a very wretch for rheumatism in the head and weakness in the eyes, or would sooner have answered your kind and welcome letter.

"I finished my 'Observations on the Natural Claim of the Mother' last week, and it is now printing at Ridgway's. There is so much dispute and worry about prosecutable passages, that I have ordered them to print now 500 copies as for *private* (!) circulation ; and when I am in town, which will be at the end of this month, I can see to the publication of it. I also intend, if possible (and what is there not possible in this world ?), to have a discussion of the alteration of that law in Parliament this session. I am very impatient to send you the pamphlet. It was a great triumph to me to see how alike what I had written and part of your letter was (what very awkward prose !). I improved the passage materially by your observation on what was permitted to women, or rather excused in women, when they receive any rudeness ; but as you are to have the trouble of reading it in print, I will not say more about it now.

"Perhaps you will not think I have gone far enough ; I thought it best to have the appearance of calmness and fairness, and I struck out many passages which

my sister, Georgiana Seymour, called my ‘callow-nestling bits.’ I insisted on the rule, already existent for illegitimate children, that children under the age of seven should belong, at all events, to the mother; and after that, access dependent, not on the father, but on the Court of Chancery. God knows that if the Court judged the conduct of women by the same laws as they do that of men, and pronounced as indulgent opinions, we should be happily protected. Conceive, in one of the cases I had from the Law Reports, the mother being obliged to leave her child in the hands of the husband’s mistress, and the Court saying it had no power to interfere. Was there ever such a perversion of natural rights? And yet those very courts assume they have a power in case of religious or political opinion on the father’s part. The fact is, in this commercial country, as it is called, the rights of property are the only rights really and efficiently protected; and the consideration of property the only one which weighs with the decision made in a court of justice. I do not mean that they decide unjustly in favour of the rich, but where there is no property law fails—as if it was for that, and not for men, that laws were made. The great obstacle, in all the cases I have looked through, to the woman obtaining her child, or even obtaining that it should be in the hands of a third party as a proper guardian, has been the want of property to justify the interference of the law.

“I also was much struck and affected by the simple story conveyed in all Mrs. Hemans’s<sup>1</sup> letters. I have a letter somewhere, containing an account of the boy Charles, which she wrote me when I was editress of that magazine, written in a true mother’s spirit; and, indeed, the mother must be a fond one who will so trust to the interest of an utter stranger as to describe and expatiate upon the qualities of some little unknown. I never saw her; but I think of all people she would least have disappointed those who had known her first by her writings; there was something German in her very soul, simple, noble, and full of a kindly and soaring spirit. As for Mr. Chorley’s portion of the work, he perhaps felt that he might be more abused

<sup>1</sup> A Memoir of Mrs. Hemans had been published in 1836 by Chorley.

for showing any vanity of authorship in a task of that sort, than for being meagre in his additions.

"There is also a difficulty in being compelled to omit the greater part of her biography, as it is necessarily entwined with family matters. [After dwelling on certain rumours and other matters of a private kind, she goes on.] The very vague manner in which he mentions the husband going to Italy for his health, and her remaining in England because of her literary avocations, made me almost smile. Fancy any woman—and more especially such a woman—staying to print poetry, while her husband went to die in Italy. The thing is absurd. One would not do it even by a husband one did not love.

"Did you observe the mem. for a poem? The sorceress who gave up, one by one, all her gifts to secure the love of a mortal, and was abandoned by him at last? I mean to seize it as my inheritance: though after that most lovely and undervalued creation, Guendolen in 'The Bridal of Triermain,' anything of that sort must seem a copy. Does it not provoke you sometimes to think how in vain the gift of genius is for a woman; how, so far from binding her more closely to the admiration and love of her fellow-creatures, it does in effect create that 'gulf across which no one passes,' and all to be forgotten! Witness its being impossible to find out when or how Aspasia died, who I believe to have been Pericles's superior in all things except the power to steer the ship of which you speak.

"I have been interrupted by letters which, by recalling to me all that is real and grating in my position, and obliging me to answer lawyers, etc., cut short that which is pleasant—writing to you. I will therefore only add a wish to know how Percy acquitted himself at his Cambridge dinner; do not mind his shyness. I believe Lord Melbourne once said of it that 'a certain sort of shyness is not only a concomitant, but a proof of real genius.' That 'certain sort of shyness' I take to be sauvagerie.

[Then follows the passage already cited, p. 12.]

"I think there is a lingering touch of this shyness in you, in spite of the finest, frankest, and prettiest manners that ever took my fancy, and I have felt it in myself very often.

"With most earnest wishes that you may be the mother of a celebrated man, whose fame shall not depend on the few eager struggling years of a restless youth, like him too early taken away, and with kind but hurried good wishes for your health and happiness during the new year now begun.

"Believe me ever yours truly,  
"CAROLINE NORTON."

On January 27, 1837, Mrs. Shelley, writing to Trelawny from Harrow, says :

"I had a long letter from Mrs. Norton. I admire her excessively, and I think I could love her infinitely, but I shall not be asked or tried, and shall take very good care not to press myself. I know what her relations think."

Many people in those days besides Caroline Norton's relations—if, indeed, these last really did think of Mrs. Shelley as she suspected—considered the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin a very perilous influence in the world. And, indeed, though she was different enough from the dangerous anarchist and social innovator so many believed her, she was yet sufficiently imbued with the vague poetic liberalism of her husband to be a deeply sympathetic companion to any one suffering from the cruel custom of society. And she had always admired Mrs. Norton, shrinkingly, indeed, with a sort of sensitive alertness to possible snubs or hardness.

There is a pretty letter of hers written somewhat earlier, on this subject, to Trelawny, which may be given here:

TO TRELAWSY FROM MRS. SHELLEY

"October 12, 1835.

"I do not wonder at your not being able to deny yourself the pleasure of Mrs. Norton's society. I never saw a woman I thought so fascinating. Had I been a man I should certainly have fallen in love with her; as a woman, ten years ago, I should have been spellbound, and had she taken the trouble, she

might have wound me round her finger. Ten years ago I was so ready to give myself away, and being afraid of men, I was apt to get ‘tousy-mousy’ for women: experience and suffering have altered all that. I am more wrapt up in myself, my own feelings, disasters, and prospects for Percy. I am now proof, as Hamlet says, both against man and woman.

“There is something in the pretty way in which Mrs. Norton’s witticisms glide, as it were, from her lips that is very charming; and then her colour, which is so variable—the eloquent blood, which ebbs and flows, mounting, as she speaks, into her neck and temples, and then receding as fast—it reminds me of the frequent quotation of ‘eloquent blood,’ and gives a peculiar attraction to her conversation; not to speak of fine eyes and open brow.

“Now do not, in your usual silly way, show her what I say. She is, despite all her talent and sweetness, a London lady. She would guy me—not, perhaps, to you (well do I know the London *ton*!) but to every one else—in her prettiest way.”

But sorrow and sympathy brought those two dissimilar natures much nearer together than Mrs. Shelley in those days would have thought possible.

Mrs. Norton’s next letter goes on with the account of her new literary labour.

“16, GREEN STREET, GROSVENOR SQUARE,  
“February 1.

“DEAR MRS. SHELLEY,

“I have been expecting to write to you every day to send my pamphlet. My pamphlet must still follow my letter. There was such a division in my family as to what I might and might not do, and such an outcry about the indelicacy of public appeal, that I delayed the press, hoping to be able to win over my people to my views. To-night Talfourd (blessed be his name for that same, and a crown of glory to him! as the Irish say) has given notice of a motion in the House of Commons to alter this law. I thought you would be glad to know this, both for the sake of the sex (whom you have not the clever woman’s affectation

of thinking inferior to men) and for me, whose first glad feeling for many months of struggling has been the public notice of an effort, at least, to be made in behalf of mothers.

"I do not know Mr. Talfourd personally, but I asked Mr. Hayward (who seems a great friend of his) to request him to undertake the task. I hardly hoped for such prompt acquiescence; but if I had to choose from the whole House of Commons, I could not choose a man whose talent and good feeling and weight with the House would give a better or so good a chance of success.

"He has the printed proof of my pamphlet. As soon as another is struck off, to correct the last few errors, I will send you a tidy copy; only, as I have now attained my great object of having it discussed in Parliament, and as some of my family are so averse to my writing on the subject, I shall only give a very few copies—one half-dozen, perhaps, out of my own family—and you will not lend it, to oblige me. I am afraid you were displeased at one sentence in my last letter. I think I was misunderstood, but I will not make awkward attempts at explanations. Though I believe you have some doubts of my general sincerity, in spite of my conviction that living in the world only alters the manner, not the feelings—I wish to God it did the latter, and perhaps I should not be so wretched just now. From which 'just now' I except to-day; for to-day the sunshine has slanted in at the windows of my heart, and I look forward to this motion of Talfourd with an eagerness I have wasted on many less worthy and less earnest hopes.

"I shall not write any more, my hand and head being equally tired with letters, and two after midnight having just sounded. I hope you will soon be in town, and that I shall see something of you. I hear you will be nearer me by a good deal than when Belgrave Place was your dwelling.

"I never felt so fagged in my life.

"Yours ever truly,

"CAROLINE N."

Serjeant-at-law Talfourd, to give him his legal appellation at that time, was a young Whig barrister,

already known in his profession as one of the junior counsel for the defendant in the recent trial Norton *v.* Lord Melbourne, and soon to be known in literature as the author of the poetical drama *Ion*; a man of a respectable though not distinguished family (his father was a brewer), of an excellent reputation in his profession and in Parliament (where he had held a seat since 1835); less remarkable, however, from any brilliant or forensic quality than from the zeal and laborious care which he expended on everything he took in hand.

He was the more ready to listen to Mrs. Norton's request that he should take up and carry her Bill for her because of his personal experience of the working of the law as it stood, experience obtained as counsel for the father against the mother in two cases of exceptional cruelty and injustice to the latter, both of which cases had been decided for his client because, as the law stood, the Courts were powerless to do otherwise.

His Bill, brought in two months after his notice of the motion already mentioned in Mrs. Norton's letter to Mrs. Shelley (p. 137), was printed, and its second reading was set for May 24. On May 24, however, it was postponed again for two weeks; and again for two weeks more. King William's death occurred in the meantime, and on June 24 Serjeant Talfourd rose again to say that he did not intend to press his measure during that session; that it was a subject of great delicacy and importance, and he himself was not entirely satisfied with the working details of the Bill.

Possibly Mrs. Norton herself was not unwilling to let things drift a little at this particular moment, for it was then, after the Bill had come up for a first reading, that her husband made his first unstable effort towards a reconciliation, and that she got her children back again, at least for a few weeks. All through May and June 1837 she had them with her nearly every day.

So when the Bill she had been so passionately

advocating through the earlier weeks of the Parliamentary session was withdrawn in June, before its second reading, some people shrugged their shoulders, and a certain Tory review in summing up the history of the measure when it was brought up again a year later ventured to suggest a certain intimate relation between the Bill's temporary collapse and the favourable turn taken about the same time in the "Norton negotiations." Such suggestion, implying petty personal aims in what ought to be a purely public measure, was sure to strike deep and leave a poisoned wound in a person so sensitive and so frank as Mrs. Norton. For it had its residuum of truth.

Her power over the Bill was her personal influence —her influence was strongest when her feeling was at its height. Distracted between hope and despair in her renewed relations with her husband and children, she would have been more or less than human if her first enthusiasm for this paper abstraction had remained at the necessary heat for influencing others to its service.

It could hardly have been by her intention that the Bill languished and died in the session of 1837 without ever coming to its second reading. If it was her fault, then, by the same token, its final success in succeeding years must be put entirely to her credit.

There was not even a glimmer or hope of personal happiness to distract her interest from the same measure when it was brought up again before the new Parliament in the short session at the end of 1837. It came up for a second reading in May 1838, and all the time it lay dormant in that exceptionally busy session, she was making every effort to interest friends for it in high places, and her own pamphlet already printed early in 1837 with its endless title, "Observation on the Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Children as affected by the Common Law Right of the Father, illustrated by Cases of Peculiar Hardship," was distributed among M.P.'s to

influence their vote in its favour. The pamphlet must once, therefore, have been easily attainable. It is now, however, exceedingly rare. In fact, I know of only one copy, mentioned in the catalogue of the library collected by the late Lord Dufferin in the building on his estate of Clandeboye, called after his mother, "Helen's Tower."

Another little pamphlet, "The Case of the Hon. Mrs. Norton," written in the third person, without the author's name, but none the less by her, was probably distributed at the same time for the same purpose. There is in the Astor Library in New York a copy of this pamphlet which was once the property of Lady Mary Fox, a daughter of William IV., and a personal friend of Mrs. Norton.

Not by these means alone, but in a hundred indirect ways, was she able to advance the Bill through the Commons.

We have an amusing little letter of advice, drawn evidently from her own experiences, to encourage Mrs. Shelley, again struggling to win some permanent annuity from her stepmother, the sum she had at first obtained from the King's bounty having been withdrawn at King William's death.

#### "24, BOLTON STREET.

"Anything I can say or do in the matter you may depend on my saying and doing; nothing worries me, except the great uncertainty of making people feel on these sorts of occasions. I think the letter to Lord Melbourne very good. I think the other a little long. I would begin direct to the point: 'As the daughter of the late Mr. Godwin, and the person on whom his aged widow mainly relies for support, I venture to address you on the subject of obtaining,' etc.

"Press not on the politics of Mr. Godwin (for God knows how much gratitude for that ever survives), but on his celebrity, the widow's age and ill-health, and (if your proud little spirit will bear it) on your toils, for, after all, the truth is that you, being generous,

will, rather than see the old creature starve, work your brains and your pen ; and you have your son and delicate health to hinder you from having means to help her.

"As to petitioning, no one dislikes begging more than I do, especially when one begs for what seems mere justice ; but I have long observed that though people will resist claims (however just) they like to do favours. Therefore, when I beg I am a crawling lizard, a humble toad, a brown snake in cold weather, or any other simile most feebly 'rampante,' the reverse of 'rampant,' which would be the natural attitude for petitioning, but which must be never assumed except in the poodle style, standing with one's paws bent to catch the bits of bread on one's nose.

"Forgive my jesting. Upon my honour, I feel sincerely anxious for your anxiety, and sad enough on my own affairs ; but Irish blood will dance. My meaning is, that if one asks at all, one should rather think of the person written to than one's own feelings. He is an indolent man—talk of your literary labours ; a kind man—talk of her age and infirmities ; a patron of all genius—talk of your father's and your own ; a prudent man—speak of the likelihood of the pension being a short grant (as you have done) ; lastly, he is a great man—take it all as a personal favour.

"As to not apologising for the intrusion, we ought always to kneel down and beg pardon for daring to remind people that we are not so well off as they are. Not knowing whether these are the letters or only copies of the letters, I have not kept them. Did you mean me to send the one to Lord Melbourne ?"

"Yours ever truly,  
"C. N."

But another letter, written more about Mrs. Shelley's affairs than her own, shows the more clearly the strain of nerves and mind the struggle at last imposed upon her.

"I have so bad a headache, I must lie down or go to bed instead of coming to see you. About the pension, I would advise that Sir Lytton Bulwer himself should ask Lord Melbourne himself. All

intermediaries bear the same proportion of use in transacting business that fal-lal-la does to the words of a song ; and though Lord M. threatens that he will instantly desire an annuity may be bought for Mrs. Godwin out of the proceeds of 'Devereux' and 'Paul Clifford,' yet I think the case not so desperate. He will do much more, being persuaded that it is fit and rational and right, than as a favour to any one.

"Sir Lytton Bulwer (what a pretty name it is) is a personal favourite—at least, I have heard him praise him, not only for talents, which all admit, but in a friendly, approving way : being a man, and a man of some weight, I think if he took the trouble to write on the subject it would do more than our petitioning ; it would make it a grave matter of business.

"I perceive no earthly obstacle except the old and usual scruple that if the rule is relaxed, and the connections of men of genius are to have claims, there will be no end of pensioning. I think you will get what you want for Mrs. Godwin nevertheless. Excuse bluntness. I am in pain ; and I wish to be understood.

"I was much disappointed at not getting what I hoped, a completely definite answer to send you, but one must take people as their natures will let one, and it is the nature of the petitioned to give indefinite answers. No one has pressed it yet on Lord Melbourne's attention, and he does not know who is the great instrument expected to do it. I am going to write to Sir L. B. myself on behalf of an Italian who wants to translate English novels ; and I will say this to him, or you can. I scrawl because I ache and am impatient.

"Yours ever,  
"C. N."

One more letter of the same series shows another phase of this acquaintanceship.

"You certainly are the pleasantest note-writer in the world, but your conduct in money matters is not so praiseworthy. If you insist on paying for your place in the balcony, well and good : it is ungenteel to refuse to be paid ; only I will say frankly once for all what I feel about it. I am conscious of being—I will not say extravagant, for that implies habitual

self-indulgence in money matters—but reckless (when I am out of spirits or want to be amused and excited) in what I spend for the moment. Now that may suit me very well (though sometimes even I repent), but it cannot suit the friends who are with me to be suddenly called upon to share in the caprices of these oppressive hours. The only thing you will achieve by making me think that we must share, is that I shall sometimes check myself, which is disagreeable to me, or sometimes be alone when it would be infinitely pleasanter to me to be in your frank and cheerful company. It gênes me to be paid for pleasures which I should equally have paid for alone (if a woman could run about alone like a young bachelor), and as I know you practise self-denial and serve those who belong to you, I think it vexes me more in you than it would in any other person. I am very prosy, and I have no change. I send back the sovereign (in a blank cover like a letter in a novel which the heroine has received), and for the future we will stand at the door of great places of amusement, consulting not our inclinations, but our pockets, with mutual deference and respect.

“I have been ill all day. I almost wish Thursday past. All you can do (and that is pretty much to ask of a lady) is to sit with me in whatever pot-house I may take up my abode, Monday.

[She and her uncle moved some time in 1838 from Green to Bolton Street.]

“I shall know better to-morrow morning what implements can be had. You will smile when you hear who I sent as T.’s substitute. My hand shakes so! What is the difference between courage and nerve? I suppose a more fearless woman does not exist as to actual bodily danger, and yet I am an ass on these occasions.

“I was amused yesterday, and I feel comfortable with Tolstoi; he is warm-hearted and sincere, and I have been used to him for six years, which is always a merit—or feels like one—in a friend; also he knows all my past joys and sorrows. “Kiss and love,” yes, Kisselieff (delightful are your comments on him) is

not so pleasing ; perhaps the very effort to fall into our ways and be cosy made him less so. To be familiar without being intimate is to canter an unbroken horse, uneasy and uncertain, not to say dangerous."

Tolstoi was an attaché of the Russian Embassy, removed from Great Britain to Paris before Mrs. Norton's separation from her husband. But he and Kisselieff were both in London with the crowd of foreign diplomats assembled there for the Queen's coronation in 1838.

The Bill passed the Commons in May 1838 by 91 to 17, a very small attendance in a House of 656 members. But it had been thought best by its supporters not to make it a Government measure. So the Tory Disraeli was found, when it came to a division, side by side with the Whig Charles Villiers and the Radical Daniel Harvey, among those who voted in its favour. But on neither side appeared the name of Mrs. Norton's uncle, Sir James Graham, who had resigned the Admiralty and seceded from the Whig party in 1836. And the historian Grote for some reason always voted against it ; also the late Lord Chancellor of Ireland and future Lord Chancellor of England, Edward Sugden, afterwards Lord St. Leonards, who opposed it with all his might at every stage of its progress.

Nothing is more remarkable in the speeches made against it in the Commons than the general assumption that all women at variance with their husbands must be guilty of unchastity ; and though on a motion of Lord Mahon an amendment was introduced in the Bill strictly limiting its advantages to such women as could prove the spotlessness of their reputation by affidavit, still the objection went on being raised that if the measure were once passed it would be impossible to keep unchaste women from getting access to their children. The fact that by the existing law a father could remove his children from a virtuous

mother and give them to his mistress—and indeed in one instance had actually done so—was calmly and constantly overlooked; and there was another conviction, equally deep-rooted, and insisted upon by Mr. Sugden and those who voted with him, that the slightest loosing of the restrictions by which women were bound, the slightest concession in their favour would change them all, even those who had hitherto been most faithful and devoted wives and mothers, into a dangerous menace to society.

Lord Lyndhurst had been entrusted with the introduction of the Bill to the Lords—the Law Lords, to speak more strictly—to whose particular attention it was the custom of this House to delegate any Bill dealing with legal matters, not by any general rule indeed; rather by general habit. For, to quote Mrs. Norton in her most flippant manner, commenting on the disinclination of hereditary legislators to take an interest, as the Commons did, in any matter they could by any means escape or delegate to others:

“ You cannot get Peers to sit up till three in the morning listening to the wrongs of separated wives. They are disturbed at the preposterous importance set by women on the society of their infant children, and doubtful as to the effect of such a claim on the authority of the heads of families. It is a relief to shift responsibility. They are content to sink back in a cushioned carriage, satisfied that Abinger’s opinion or Wynford’s speech or Brougham’s opposition will fairly settle what may be the amount of endurance a woman shall be legally bound to undergo.”

Lord Holland and the Duke of Sutherland and Lord Denman were among the Bill’s supporters in the Lords; Mrs. Norton’s old enemy, Lord Wynford, of course voted against it. But its most bitter and brilliant opponent was the ex-Chancellor Brougham, whose former admiration for her had been apparently cooled by later events, or had never been strong enough to break through his custom just then of

opposing anything advocated by Lord Lyndhurst. His speech against the Bill was a triumph of sophistry. Its tenor is shown by the following friendly, indignant little letter from Lord Holland to Mrs. Norton :

“ 1839.

“ Nothing could be worse, in logick and feeling, than his (Brougham’s) speech on the Bill. It was that, several legal hardships being of necessity inflicted on women, *therefore* we should not relieve them from those which are not necessary, although repugnant to the feelings of our nature, and indeed to nature itself.

“ Whenever and whence-ever Lyndhurst proposes his Bill—from the woolsack or benches—he will find me on the seat fate may assign me, ready to support it. I honour him for not sacrificing his feelings on this occasion, either to the pedantry of law or the convenience of politicks, and I heartily wish him success in the Bill.

“ Yours,  
“ VASSAL HOLLAND.”

But a majority of the Law Lords were against it. It was rejected by them in August 1838, and all the labour of the past session was to be done over again.

## CHAPTER XII

### INFANT CUSTODY BILL—LETTER TO THE LORD CHANCELLOR—VISIT TO ITALY

THE failure of the Infant Custody Bill was not the most painful event of this summer of 1838—the summer of the Queen's coronation. Indeed, even the Queen's coronation had brought for Mrs. Norton only a series of exasperating and painful experiences. We hear of her at Lord Lansdowne's great ball given just before the all-important event; and almost the same day we can read in the papers a long account of the odious civil suit before Lord Abinger, where all her private affairs were freely exposed to prove her husband's non-liability to support her. And while the Lords were still debating the Bill on which so much of her future happiness depended, *The British and Foreign Review*, a Tory quarterly of some note in its day, but which has long since ceased to exist, published in its August number the insulting attack of which we have already made mention.

It was a very virulent and offensive article, in which, after a long arraignment of the Bill itself, the last few pages were taken up by a personal attack upon both Serjeant Talfourd and Mrs. Norton, coupling their names together in offensive innuendo, accusing Mr. Talfourd of being the tool of a dangerous woman, who, besides being an undutiful and rebellious wife, was

also the author of several violent pamphlets on the equality of the sexes.

The first impulse of the chief victim of this attack on seeing herself thus publicly insulted was to bring a suit for libel against *The Review*, for the false statements with which its pages were bristling ; and her discovery that a married woman had no right to sue apart from her husband did not diminish the exasperation with which she prepared the only retaliation in her power, a letter to Mr. Fonblanque's paper, *The Examiner*, a letter afterwards reprinted in *The Times*.

This public defence is chiefly interesting for its passionate denial that the delay in the progress of the Bill arose from "the Norton negotiations taking a more favourable turn."

"The delay, I believe, was to improve the details of the Bill, and if it should please God to-day to give me back my little children, my interest for the measure would still continue. It did not begin with my own misfortunes, and will not end with them."

The letter is interesting also for its extreme eagerness to disprove the imputation that she was in any way connected with that band of strong-minded women who had even then begun to preach the equality of the sexes and to make loud general declarations on the rights and wrongs of women.

To such doctrines she was indeed to the end of her life fluently opposed. Many years after the writing of this letter, she was just as ready to declare her opinion that—

"The wild and stupid theories advanced by a few women, of 'equal rights' and 'equal intelligence' are not the opinions of their sex. I, for one (I, with millions more), believe in the natural superiority of man, as I do in the existence of a God.

"The natural position of woman is inferiority to man. Amen ! That is a thing of God's appointing, not of man's devising. I believe it sincerely, as a part

of my religion. I never pretended to the wild and ridiculous doctrine of equality."

These sentiments sound strangely now, especially from a woman who did such good practical service towards making women equal with men, at least before the law. But they are very characteristic of her type of mind, English, I may say, even more than feminine—practical rather than speculative, impatient, or even a little scornful of the theory, while most busy tinkering at the reforms of which the theory is the soul and spirit. She was always more interested in the protection of women by men, or if men failed them by the law, than in any inherent right women might be proved to possess for self-direction or self-assertion. Women had only one right, she was constantly declaring, and that was to protection from those wiser and stronger than themselves. It was this which she urged most constantly in her crusade for her measure, and with the best results.

But though able and eager to defend herself from the attack which her activities in this direction had excited against her, a letter of hers, written months afterwards to Murray, shows her still bruised and aching from the pelting of coarse words she had received upon that occasion:

"24, BOLTON STREET, *Monday.*

"DEAR SIR,

"You have been very kind in sending me books. I send you a very interesting one, in my opinion, though I fear not one of general interest. It is a letter to the Lord Chancellor on the subject of the Infant Custody Bill; and in the course of which (in answer to a direct and most bitter personal attack made on me by Mr. John Kemble) the facts of my case are briefly given.

"I hope you will read the letter and let me know your opinion upon it. Mr. Kemble's attack wrung from me a contradiction last summer, which first

appeared in *The Examiner* (signed with my name) and afterwards was copied into other papers. It is so easy to crush a woman, especially one whose reputation has been already slandered, that I do not think his triumph is very great, in having created a prejudice by inventing a gross falsehood; attributing to me that which I never wrote, and then abusing me in very foul and gross language as the author. I might in the same way assert that the Bishop of London wrote Little's poems, and that he was therefore a disgrace to the Bench of Bishops.

"Dear Sir, I do not suppose this letter will be of sufficient consequence to be reviewed in *The Quarterly*, but the subject of the letter will perhaps be noticed, as it is one of the questions to be noticed this session. I entreat of you, if such shall be the case, to use your influence to prevent my name (which has grown to be only the watchword of insult and cruel abuse) from being any more alluded to. Let those who dislike me be satisfied in the assurance that I have suffered, and do suffer, as much, I believe, as my worst foes could wish. I have one poor boast, and that is, that my foes are all among strangers; it is reserved for those who never knew me personally, who perhaps never saw me in their lives, to erect themselves into judges of my character and motives, to erect an imaginary Mrs. Norton, something between a barn-actress and a Mary Wollstonecraft, and to hunt her down with unceasing perseverance; while the reality of this shadow is perhaps lying ill and broken-hearted, as I was at the time when Mr. Kemble wrote against me, vainly endeavouring, through the mediation of those who do know me, to arrange a quarrel I never sought, and which took place under circumstances the very reverse of those supposed by the world. I have trespassed on your indulgence with a very long note; pray excuse it, and

"Believe me, yours truly obliged,  
"CAROLINE NORTON."

The "Letter to the Lord Chancellor," mentioned in her note to Murray, was not the least result of a summer of wretched struggle with her creditors and her husband through her creditors in the law-courts,

of libellous abuse for which her anomalous position allowed her no remedy. This second pamphlet was printed for distribution to members of Parliament in December 1838, and used by her to help carry her Bill through its third Parliamentary session.

A copy of it is to be seen in the Lenox Library in New York. "A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Law of Custody of Infants," by Pearse Stevenson, Esq., with a little inscription written under the pseudonym, in her own handwriting, explaining that it was "a name adopted, as I feared, if they knew it was a woman's writing, it would have less weight."

A polemical tract on a long-dead issue! And yet it can still be read with interest and pleasure; indeed the clearness and precision of its argument, its grace and charm of expression, give to her conclusions a sort of brilliancy, like her own wit and beauty. Many pages, too, can be taken quite unreservedly as autobiography, all the more interesting, perhaps, from the restraints imposed upon her by her assumed character of a grave, unimpassioned barrister. The little passage, for instance, of a bride's relations to her husband's family, is notably from her own experience :

"The son, and brother, goes out into the world and selects a wife to please himself; he brings this stranger (who is, and expects to be, all in all to him) into the bosom of his own family—persons utterly dissimilar, perhaps in every thought and feeling, educated in opposite opinions and prejudices, are thus suddenly forced into companionship and intimacy; a natural and affectionate jealousy of the husband, son, and brother, who is the common link between them, diminishes the small portion of indulgence which, under the circumstances, each might be willing to accord the other; they become mutually disagreeable; the bride wonders how her 'beloved Henry' could have sprung up among such odious people; the family marvel at his rashness in marrying so unamiable a person. All this dissatisfaction is increased if the bride be a wit, a beauty, a fortune (though that is

generally the safest quality she can possess), or in any way entitled to give herself a few of those pretty airs so common in a bridegroom's idol."

Then follows an account of the unfortunate results if both families-in-law meddle in the differences between husband and wife—not the smallest cause, indeed, of her own sufferings :

"The two families instantly enroll themselves with a bitterness of animosity which no one who has not witnessed it would believe, and which frequently far outdoes the feelings of resentment burning in the hearts of the two principals. The husband is taunted into frenzy ; the wife is encouraged to defiance ; the smallest concession on his part is treated by his family as folly, weakness, dishonourable submission. The wife finds she has to struggle, not against one angry man, but against a whole regiment of angry men and women, to whom, perhaps, the only real offence of her life has been 'that having eyes he chose her,' and that she, being young and pretty, and he much in love, exercised at one time more influence over him than father, mother, brother, or sister."

Here is a passage which gives direct admittance to her mind, as she thought of her own husband and her own relations, past and to come, with the little children that belonged to both him and her :

"It would be impossible to explain to children of tender age the circumstances of a family quarrel ; no woman would be mad enough to attempt it, knowing that the only effect must be to shake and unsettle their minds on the great principle of parental duty, without giving her any advantage in their affection which an hour's persuasion and reasoning from their other parent might not equally undo.

"Besides, it is not only probable, but natural, that in some cases a woman may heartily and sincerely desire that her children may love their father, although she be separated from them. As to justification, she is very unlikely to need one. There is so strong an

instinct of affection implanted by God in the young child's heart towards the being who has watched over his helpless infancy, that the difficulty is to be found, not in justifying a mother in his eyes, or preserving a due share of fondness for her, but on the contrary, in any way degrading, or bringing him to dislike or forget her. You may teach a child that his mother is an object of contempt or hatred to those around him ; he will feel and know it, as it were, by instinct, for children are most accurate observers. You may teach him to hush his little voice to a whisper when he utters her forbidden name, or never to pronounce it, for this is only an effort of his half-matured reason to show submission and compliance to those in authority over him ; but nature's great instinct will remain nevertheless, strong and unchangeable, except in rare instances. He will love and honour his mother, he will sometimes wonder at her absence, and sometimes pine for her return ; he will comprehend that she is the subject of vehement displeasure, without comprehending that she has deserved it ; he will perceive that there is a quarrel, but nothing else."

It is interesting to find a most enthusiastic criticism of this pamphlet in a letter of the American jurist, Sumner, who was being honourably received in London during the winter of 1839. We find it in Pierce's Life of that statesman, under the date of February 16.

"One of the pleasantest dinners I ever enjoyed was with Mrs. Norton. She now lives with her uncle, Mr. Charles Sheridan, who is a bachelor. We had a small company : old Edward Ellice ; Fonblanque, whose writings you so much admire ; Hayward, Phipps, the brother of the Marquis of Normanby ; Lady Seymour, the sister of Mrs. Norton ; and Lady Graham and Mrs. Phipps. All of these are very clever people. Ellice is the person whose influence is said, more than that of all other men, to keep the present Ministry in power.

"But the women were far more remarkable than the men. I unhesitatingly say that they were the four

most beautiful, clever, and accomplished women I have ever seen together. The beauty of Mrs. Norton has never been exaggerated. It is brilliant and refined. Her countenance is lighted by eyes of the intensest brightness, and her features are of the greatest regularity. There is something tropical in her look, it is so intensely bright and burning, with large dark eyes, dark hair, and Italian complexion. And her conversation is so pleasant and powerful, without being masculine; or rather it is masculine without being mannish; there is the grace and ease of the woman, with a strength and skill of which any man might well be proud.

"Mrs. Norton is about twenty-eight [she was nearly thirty-one] and is, I believe, a grossly slandered woman. She has been a woman of fashion, and has received many attentions, which doubtless she would have declined had she been brought up under the advice of a mother, but which we may not wonder she did not decline, circumstanced as she was. It will be enough for you, and I doubt not you will be happy to hear it of so remarkable and beautiful a woman, that I believe her utterly innocent of the grave charges that have been brought against her. I count her one of the brightest intellects I have ever met. I whisper in your ear what is not to be published abroad, that she is the unaided author of a tract which has just been published on the Infant Custody Bill, and purports to be by Pearse Stevenson, Esq., a *nom de guerre*. I think it is one of the most remarkable things from the pen of a woman. The world here does not suspect her, but supposes that the tract is the production of some grave barrister. It is one of the best discussions on a legislative matter I have ever read.

"I should have thought Mrs. Norton the most beautiful woman I had ever seen if her sister, Lady Seymour, had not been present. I think that Lady Seymour is generally considered the most beautiful. Her style of beauty is unlike Mrs. Norton's; her features are smaller, and her countenance lighter and more English. In any other drawing-room she would have been deemed quite clever and accomplished, but Mrs. Norton's claims to these last characteristics are so pre-eminent as to dwarf the talents and attainments

of others of her sex who are by her side. Lady Seymour has no claim to literary distinction. The homage she receives is offered to her beauty and her social position. Lady Graham is older than these; while Mrs. Phipps is younger. These two were only inferior in beauty to Mrs. Norton and Lady Seymour."

We hear of her again from another American, John Van Buren, son of the President of the United States, who had come to England for the Queen's coronation, and was still lingering there in March of the following year.

He met her at a reception at Babbage's, standing in a doorway, talking to Mr. Talfourd. She was very gracious to him and he admired her conversation, but her beauty was so unlike the fragile loveliness of his own countrywomen that he was not entirely pleased with "that superb lump of flesh," as Sidney Smith once jokingly called her. She had never a graceful figure. Her splendid, heavy head was set well forward on her neck, the bend of beauty as our grandmothers used to call it; and though rather above medium height, she did not look tall because of a certain heaviness and clumsiness of hips and shoulders.

It was in the summer of this year, 1839, that the Bill for which she had fought so long was finally carried, not only through the House, but through that cave of Conservative opposition to every Liberal measure, the Lords.

But the strain of the long struggle had had its effect upon her health. Her favourite sister, Helen Blackwood, Lady Dufferin by her husband's accession to the title earlier this same year, was going to spend the winter in Southern Italy. It was decided that Caroline should accompany the Dufferins on their journey.

A letter of Mrs. Norton's to the author of "*Philip Van Artevelte*," congratulating him on his marriage

with Miss Spring Rice, mentions also the date of her departure :

“BOLTON STREET,  
“Monday, October 1839.

“I send you what the children call a ‘parting present,’ having once before had that generous intention when you left a whip here by mistake, but at that time thought better of it.

“I hope you will be happy. There is no one, I believe, deserves happiness more; and I also hope, when you have power over the destiny of another, that you will remember that the most intelligent woman God ever made has something of the child in disposition, and that the indulgence shown to children is as necessary in their case (if you mean either to be happy) as with an infant of three years old. Do not laugh at me for lecturing my betters. It is only when I think of some fresh and uncommenced destiny that I look gravely and sadly back at all the mistakes in my own; and I am convinced that, as we bring more courage to the endurance of the great than the lesser evils of our lives, so we grant more indulgence to the real and positive faults of our every-day companions than to their moods, their habits, their small waywardnesses, the points where they neither fit our own dispositions nor our preconceived notions of what would suit and please us. I hope all will go well with you and yours.

“We start on Friday morning for our Italian tour; it is a great change for me. I hope it will be both pleasant and beneficial; I shall then feel more as if I had broken and disjointed my past from my future than I have yet been able to do.

“With every good wish, believe me,

“Yours very truly,

“CAROLINE NORTON.”

Pleasant and beneficial this first Italian trip must have been to that eager, beauty-loving nature, so long compelled to struggle in unnatural ways. I quote a lovely little bit from her own poetry to show something

of her ecstasy at this first sight of Italian cities and scenery :

“ Beautiful land. When first mine eyes beheld thee,  
Leaped not my heart as though it knew thee well?  
As though returning from a weary exile  
In my own home I came at length to dwell?  
All my life long, beholding Beauty's fragments,  
A southern smile on proud impassioned lips,  
A southern shadow 'neath some dreaming eyelid,  
A southern glow, in mist and dull eclipse;  
Till round me all at once, beloved, familiar,  
Lay the clear glories of the sunny clime,  
And my soul thrilled and trembled with a rapture  
Unknown, unrecked of, in the former time.”

*Fisher's Drawing-room Scrap-book* for 1846.—“ Genoa.”

## CHAPTER XIII

### PETITION TO THE LORD CHANCELLOR—DEATH OF WILLIAM

MRS. NORTON was back in England again early in 1840, busy as usual with law and lawyers. This time, however, thanks to her own exertions, she had some part of the law on her own side.

The new Act permitted any mother who was denied access to her young children, if she could prove by affidavit that her own character was above reproach, to petition the Lord Chancellor for a hearing before a special court, composed of the Lord Chancellor, the Master of the Rolls, or other Chancery judges. The court, if convinced of the justice of her cause, could grant her access to her children when and how it thought best.

A clever young barrister and *Quarterly* reviewer, whom we have already found frequently mentioned as a friend of Mrs. Norton's, undertook to collect the affidavits required for her petition. This was Abraham Hayward, among whose published letters we find so many of her own, signed "C. Client," her nickname for herself with him, while her nickname for him was "Avocat," for this reason. He never signed his full name "Abraham," for he hated it, and could not bear the least allusion to it, and she was fully aware of this little weakness on his part; so that one day when some lady, who was bent on teasing him, asked him in

her drawing-room what his "A" stood for, Arthur or Andrew, Mrs. Norton, to cover his vexation, quickly replied "Oh, dear no, it stands for 'Avocat'"; and "Avocat" she always used to call him afterwards, styling herself his client.

I quote his own account of one of his experiences while thus engaged in her service.

"It was necessary to come prepared with affidavits negativing the imputation of infidelity; and one day a friend of Mrs. Norton's, engaged in getting up the case, [himself] received a message from Lord Melbourne requesting him to call the next morning early. Calling between ten and eleven, he found Lord Melbourne in his dressing-gown and slippers, in the act of shaving. 'So,' was the abrupt address, 'you are going to revive that business. It is confoundedly disagreeable.'

"'You know, my lord, that Mrs. Norton can't live without her children.'

"'Well, well, if it must be done, it must be done effectively. You must have an affidavit from me. The story about me was all a d——d lie, as you know. Put that into proper form and I'll swear it.'"

But it was necessary for her to prove herself guiltless through the years that had already elapsed since her separation from her husband, and it was just at this time that a strange, disquieting incident occurred, which was noticed in the public papers of the day, and brought one at least of the persons connected with it into the police courts.

During the latter part of the year 1840, if not before, Mrs. Norton became convinced that not only her house, but she herself was being watched, for some not very creditable purpose. There were other small occurrences, too, amounting at last to a petty persecution. On one occasion, for instance, she received a letter purporting to be on business, requesting her to call at a certain address, which turned out to be a house of ill-fame. Late in December, she began to

notice a rather shabby-looking individual, who seemed to haunt the street in which she lived—a sort of antiquated old beau, all powder and white waistcoat, who finally introduced himself to her in a letter as Captain Edward Piers, lately retired from the army, and living on half-pay, who had become so impressed with the story of her wrongs that he was ready to offer himself as a mediator, or at least conduct her to a place where she might see her children.

Something in the wording of the note, its extraordinary familiarity with matters only to be gathered from her husband and those closest to him, or herself, seemed to offer the final link in this strange little chain of accidents. She was convinced that this letter, with those preceding it, was part of a plot concocted by her husband and Lord Grantley to compromise her, to increase her difficulties in getting the affidavits necessary for her petition to the Chancellor.

She accordingly decided to have the man arrested the next time he made any effort to approach her. She had not long to wait. Late one afternoon, a few days before Christmas, the man forced his way into the house after Mrs. Sheridan, who had just been admitted to see her daughter, and even entered a room opening from the hall, in spite of the efforts of the servant and Mrs. Sheridan to prevent him. He was found there by the policeman who had been on duty for more than a week for this particular purpose, lost in contemplation (such was his impudent assertion to the police magistrate) of a picture of the great Sheridan, which he had found hanging on the wall, and in which he recognised a former patron and friend.

The case came up before the Marlborough police court, December 23, but was dismissed, when Mrs. Norton, who had appeared against him in person, accompanied by her uncle, Mr. Sheridan, consented not to press the charge, if the prisoner promised not to molest her further. But the prisoner's letter to her,

which had to be admitted as evidence, with her own imprudent admissions to the judge, when she was called to tell her story, soon betrayed the connection she believed to exist between this petty persecutor and her husband, or her husband's family.

A full account of the case appeared in the newspapers next morning, stirring up all the hardly-laid scandals of Lord Melbourne's trial, and even George Norton was moved to send a solemn assurance to his wife through his fellow-magistrate, Mr. Hardwicke, that he had nothing to do with this last attempt to molest her.

But the business of her petition must have dragged on to extraordinary length, for we find her in the summer of 1841 still waiting and working in the matter, writing to Mr. Hayward from her favourite Isle of Wight :

“COWES, July 23, 1841.

“DEAR AVOCAT,

“I was sorry not to see you yesterday, having (at the risk of the remainder of my reputation here) desired the boatman to row me to the steamers each time they came in, and each time frankly replying to his question, ‘It is a gentleman friend as you expects, marm?’ ‘Yes, Clarke.’ Indeed, but for my boatman I should find Cowes dull, but he is a treasure. . . . The mixture of wheedling and frankness, of shrewdness and simplicity, of great and real kindness to those they believe poor, with a very great approximation to swindling by monstrous overcharge to those they think rich, forms the groundwork of the character of your true boatman; and if you can cross the breed, as in this instance, by matching a boatman’s daughter with a real sailor, the race produced will be quite inestimable; adding to the above primary qualities utter fearlessness of danger, great merriment and humour, and a peculiar readiness of apprehension worth all the intellect and genius in the world; besides a charm of manner quite distinct from taught rules of politeness, and yet as good, if not better. The fact is, in our ‘Island Home’ your boatman is the only

parallel to the peasant of other countries. Farmers want to be gentlemen, and often are in every sense of the word ; tradesmen want to be rakes and lords, and tread on the heels of the faults, manners, and habits, etc. of the upper classes. Ploughmen are sulky and stupid machines (in general) ; cottagers shy and often dispirited and distant neighbours ; your boatman is the only fraction of the English masses who at once acknowledges the enormous gulf of distance between his social position and yours, and asserts with cheerful independence his right of brotherhood in spite of that distance. You may make him duller by not meeting him half-way, but you can't make him less familiar ; you may make him happier and gayer by conversing merrily with him, but you won't bring him a grain nearer insolence. I take that to be the peasant character. I am not sure that in the over-educating of the classes who never can have our leisure, whatever else they may obtain that is ours, we have not destroyed all our companionship with them : they climb just close enough to our level to prevent their looking up to us ; they elbow us, and we have no longer room to stretch out our hand in fellowship with them.

"Pray don't think I am in love with my boatman. He is sixty, and very weather-beaten. Give me the benefit of 'whatever doubt may arise in your mind.' I don't wish to prejudice my jury, but I must say he showed great sympathy in the non-arrival of my 'gentleman friend,' and took me (by way of comfort) to see a little deserted schooner that had been towed into port with nothing but a dog and two canaries on board, having been left (supposed sinking) by her crew. It was a common sight to him, but he knew it would be a little treat for me, and did the honours, with a Devonshire House urbanity, of its broken sides, torn sails, and disordered rigging. Good Avocat, if you can but manage this business, there will be no one I shall ever feel so grateful to, and I really think and hope you will, and I will make my third son 'look up' to you when he is at the Bar, as a guiding star. Lest I should be tempted to add to my most lengthy observations on boatmen something on barristers, I hastily conclude. Do you believe shrimps are happy ?

Great naturalists attribute their incessant skippings to the vulgar mode of expressing rapture commonly called ‘jumping for joy,’ but the new school of philosophy will rather have it that they are out of breath, and trying to reach the water! On which side are you? Forgive me pursuing you with these marine subjects so far inland, and believe me,

“Ever yours truly,  
C. NORTON.”

And, after all, the case never came to a public hearing; but this only because George Norton at the last minute withdrew his opposition and proposed to compromise.

“He yielded,” his wife says bitterly, “simply so far as the law would have compelled him, and as was necessary to save himself from the threatened and certain exposure which my appeal under the new law would have entailed. I saw my children in the most formal and comfortless manner. There was no mercy or generosity. I expected none. He even made it a personal quarrel with his colleague and fellow magistrate, Mr. Hardwicke, because Mr. Hardwicke had permitted me one evening to be in his box at the play with my children. He locked the children themselves up for a whole day, to punish them, and impress upon their memories that they were not to be seen with me in any public place. Their interviews with me were to be in private, that no one might know or guess he had been obliged to yield.”

It was during the Christmas holidays of 1841 that she was thus grudgingly allowed to see her boys again. She was still struggling to exact better terms for herself and them in the following spring, March 1842, when we read of her in the “Reminiscences” of Mr. James Hamilton, a son of Alexander, at a party at Lord Palmerston’s.

“I saw coming into the room alone a lady in a rich black dress, with beautiful black hair plainly dressed, and I directly asked who that beautiful woman was.

"My companion said: 'Don't you know her? That is the Honourable Mrs. Norton. Shall I present you to her?'

"And thus I became acquainted with that very talented and much-injured woman. Our conversation (standing together where I was presented) was animated and interesting.

"I asked her if she was writing anything.

"She said: 'No! I am in Chancery.'

"'What do you mean?'

"'I am endeavouring to induce the Chancellor to allow me to have my children with me at all times, that I may direct their education. At present they only come to me for an hour or two on particular days.'

"'Allow me to say, madam, I have a remedy for that. I think you said you wished to go to the United States?'

"'I intend to do so.'

"'I am to sail next week from Liverpool. I care nothing for your Lord Chancellors. The day before, when your boys are with you, I will come to your door, take them in my carriage, post to Liverpool, go on board ship, and you can follow them as soon as you please.'

"This badinage excited and pleased her."

A small memorial of this meeting is the copy of her "Letter to the Lord Chancellor," now found in the Lenox library, presented to Mr. Hamilton with its autograph inscription by Mrs. Norton, and given many years later to the library by Mr. Hamilton's grandson, Major Philip Schuyler, of Nevis.

But her children were never really given back to her on the terms she demanded, "to be with her at all times, that she might direct their education," until a tragic accident had deprived her for ever of the youngest of them, and the very pain of a common bereavement had compelled a gentler spirit in her husband.

In the autumn of 1842 all three children were, as usual, with their father on his Yorkshire estate of

Kettlethorpe, when Willie, the baby, by that time grown to be a little lad of eight years old, out riding alone on his pony, was thrown and, though he was only slightly hurt by the fall, blood-poisoning set in from neglect of a bad scratch he had received on his arm and he died before the arrival of his mother, who had been sent for when his condition was judged more serious. In her own words : "Sir Fitzroy and Lady Kelly were staying with Mr. Norton in the country. Lady Kelly (who was an utter stranger to me) met me at the railway station. I said : 'I am here. Is my boy better ?'

"'No,' she said, 'he is not better, he is dead.' And I found, instead of my child, a corpse already coffined."

A letter written at this time by her to Rogers, the poet, gives the rest of the story.

"MR. CHARLESWORTH'S, CHAPEL THORPE,  
"Tuesday, September 13.

"DEAREST MR. ROGERS,

"Thank you for your letter to my boy. He asked leave to write to some one who would be 'really sorry,' and I gave him your name and my sister Georgiana's. I still feel stunned by this sudden blow. The accident happened here, and I have been sheltered here ever since, and do not leave till Thursday, when my fair young thing will be laid in the grave. The room here where he died (and which was the first I entered)—the room where there was so much hurry and agony, and then such dismal silence and darkness—is empty and open again, and the little decorated coffin is lying at his father's house (about two miles off) alone ; for Mr. Norton is gone to Lord Grantley's [Grantley Hall] till to-morrow, which is fixed for the funeral. He died conscious ; he prayed, and asked Norton to pray ; he asked for me twice. He did not fear to die, and he bore the dreadful spasms of pain with a degree of courage which the doctor says he has rarely seen in so young a child. He had every attention and kindness which could be shown, and every comfort which was needed. He was kept here, not at first from any apprehension of danger, but because

in his father's house there is no attendance—nothing but an old woman who opens the gate. It may be sinful to think bitterly at such a time; and at least I have not uttered the thoughts of my heart; I have choked them back, to spare pain to one who never spared it to me! But it is not in the strength of human nature not to think, 'This might not have happened had I watched over them!' or not I! put me, put their mother on one side—make a cipher of me, who nursed and bore him. Half what is now so lavishly expended in ceremony and decoration of the coffin which contains the senseless clay of my little lost one would have paid some steady man-servant to be in constant attendance on their hours of recreation. My poor little spirited creature was too young to rough it alone, as he was left to do; and this is the end of it! When I first came down Mr. Norton was in bitter distress, and he comforted me with promises for the other boys—for those that remain. But his impressions are so weak and wavering that I only tremble. Oh! it is a hard thing that I and my boys—that so many hearts should be in the absolute power of one who has no heart. In a few days all will be as if it had not been, to him! Already there is a change; already he thinks less of the anguish which made me almost kneel for the boy [Brinsley] who is with me than of the doubt whether that does not in some ways cancel his authority. I have had hard words to bear even now, but I am too miserable to shrink from them. He was better before Grantley came down. Meanwhile he has at least allowed me to take Brin with me to London for a few days before they return to school; my eldest will also join me for a day or two. They return on Saturday, the 1st. If you are in town, I will ask you to let my boy come to you some morning; he is very eager about it. Poor little fellow! He thinks, having seen his father and me weeping together, all is once more peace and home. He made me write out a list of his relations and of Brinsley's and Georgie's children. He is full of eager anticipation to make friends of all that belong to me. He was dreadfully overcome at first, and had an hysterick fit when he saw his brother dead; but at his age (eleven next November), and with his buoyant temper, sorrow

must be very temporary. My other boy's forethought, tenderness, and precocious good sense will, if God spares him, be the blessing of my life. He understands, by intuition, all I feel, and all that ought to be. He soothes his father, and watches me as if I, not he, was the helpless one ; and God knows I am helpless ! But my child is out of the storm ; he is in heaven. Too young to have offended, he is with those whose 'angels do always behold the face of our Father.' I will write to you again ; good and kind you have always been to me. God bless you ; I shall have left this on Thursday morning.

"Your affectionate

"CAROLINE NORTON."

She wrote to her sister, Lady Seymour, a few days later :

"MR. CHARLESWORTH'S,  
"CHAPEL THORPE, WAKEFIELD,

"Tuesday, September 20, 1842.

"DEAR GEORGIE,

"My uncle brought me your letter with others to-day. He came down to attend the funeral, very kindly. You know I do not care about these forms, but Norton does, and I asked my uncle, when Norton asked me—in the first hour of his distress, which was very heavy. But he is better now. You will probably get letters I have written to Brinsley and my mother, which will tell you all about me, and also a letter from poor little Brin with enclosures, and if you will write him a line, poor child, you will do me a favour, for I allowed him to write to you and Rogers, and he is so eager about his answers. He is quite recovered, and, indeed, gay again, but had a sort of hysterical fit when he first saw death in the little familiar face. I believe I should be thankful it is neither of the others. I believe it would have been worse to bear if it had pleased God to take either of them. But it is of no use just yet to struggle after any comfort at all, for I cannot feel or think in any way as I should—frantic bitterness, great horror, and fear of its being an offence to God to feel as I do is all that is present with me.

"The accident would not have happened if they had

the commonest attendance granted to gentlemen's sons. It is easy to say (as Grantley did) that there was no help for it, and it was God's will he should die. On that ground we might never call in a doctor, or take any other precaution. He died because he was too young to rough it alone, as he was obliged to do ; and it is in vain to say he did not. He lies now in a decorated coffin of purple and silver and enclosing one of lead, that when Norton is Lord Grantley he may 'remove him if he pleases to the family vault': a vault has been opened here and built up of brick. All that is needless, all that is of ceremony and expense now ; but he died in a stranger's house, because there were not the common comforts of a sick-room at his father's, and in consequence of an accident, which might not have occurred if one quarter of the sum now lavished on nothing had been paid to a steady man-servant to go out with them. There is a funeral 'party' collected at Norton's house, or rather at Grantley's (for there is nothing at Kettlethorpe but his little coffin, alone in the dining-room where he used to play), but the funeral and all will be over to-morrow, and then I shall go away with my uncle. Little Brin goes with me and stays till Saturday, October 1, when both the remaining boys go back to school.

"I did think at first that Norton would be very pliable about them, and he wanted me to return to him, etc., but I do not in my conscience believe he wills a thing two hours running. I have tried and failed in the only matter I had at heart, which was to change their school [at Eton]. You have no idea what they have gone through, or how unfit B. is to be a master. Norton said he should 'have to pay for this half at all events,' therefore they had better go back, having admitted ten minutes before that Fletcher's health could not stand it, and that the doctors had warned him of that, and having also said he would 'lay down his life for his dear boys.' It is all hopeless, and I expect Fletcher will be the next to suffer from the obstinacy which no event will turn : the only gleam of steadiness he has, is perpetually thinking himself in the right. I have not reproached him, and this happy frame of mind will prevent his reproaching himself.

My poor little Willie asked for me twice, but he was too little accustomed to me to miss my care or nursing. He prayed and died without fear, so young as he was. I can feel that he is in heaven. I saw little enough of him in this life. God grant I may meet him in another!

“I hope all yours are well.

“Yours affectionately,

“CAROLINE.

“Give Nell my love.”

There was still a struggle with her husband before he would bind himself by legal agreement to admit her to a fair share of the companionship of the two children left to her.

There is a letter on this subject written to her sister.

“DEAREST GEORGIE,

“I am so nervous that I can't even express myself, having my own affairs just talked over and hanging on a hair. Talfourd is most kind and earnest. They have yielded the point about the children. I am to be with them half the year, but Norton wants to force me to live at Kettlethorpe that half-year, which would never do. That is, in fact, his having them all the year and letting me see them five months. I am, in fear and trembling, standing firm for their actual residence under my own roof. Pray answer me by return of post if only a single line, whether you and Co. think me right. I am so afraid of missing them altogether, and yet so afraid that if I give in I shall be cheated.

“Ever yours,

“CARRY.

“I hope to come down directly.”

The question of residence was finally decided in her favour and a letter to Mr. Rogers from London, where she had been permitted to have both her boys with her for a little while before they went back to school, shows already some measure of a return to her old gay courage.

*"Saturday, October 8.*

"DEAR OLD FRIEND,

"My boys are gone back to school: the eldest only yesterday, as after the funeral he became very unwell, and so continued for some days. And now I want to leave this house for a little [Bolton Street], and come where I hope you still are. You kindly wrote to offer to take me rooms; will you do so? Like Gilpin's well-judging wife, I would have a reasonable eye to economy, but as it is for a short time—three weeks, or less—and I am sick and sad, I would rather be at the hotel than have the trouble of even a small house. If I could have a very airy double-bedded room and a little sitting-room, my maid and I would require nothing more in the way of lodging. Then if you would tell the landlady to charge board per week, and give me what she pleases—promising that I never want and never eat 'pies and cakes and dainties,' but really only a morsel of meat and potatoes—it would be a very agreeable arrangement to me, as I should be spared all thought just now, and live like a lily of the field—or a weed of the cliff. There is a business-like beginning, like the poetess who desired to borrow of you. My boys are nice creatures—intelligent, free-spirited, and true; they are so happy at being reknit to me that I can scarcely think of it without weeping. Little Brin is brimful of gratitude and love to all who ever loved or were kind to me. He made me walk down to your house, and we stood outside the little iron gate which has so often admitted me for pleasant mornings, for some time, talking of the nightingales and Milton's receipt for 'Paradise Lost' and all the treasures in your shut-up house. The elder is quieter, more thoughtful, less spirited, but seems like an angel to me, and his whole care is to keep watch over his father's kindness, that it may not flicker or go out from me. Mr. Norton has a very great love for them, I do believe—more than I thought or expected—and young as my eldest boy is, he is allowed the greatest influence over his father's mind, and uses it with a tenderness and tact very unusual at his age. I think and hope that we shall now be very friendly together, even if we continue apart. Mr. Norton went to the school to desire they would consider me equal with

himself, and not be further controlled as to seeing them—to come and go on my own direction. You may believe I have no greater anxiety than to satisfy him now, and prove to him, poor fellow, that it will answer better to allow this peace to fall upon us than the long war which is ended. He is very sorry for his little one, and very proud of these two. I have sent a letter of Brin's to his uncle Brinsley, which I will show you, as I think it very touching, and indeed it would be good reading for such men as in anger resolve to break the tie of mother and child. In it he says, 'I think I would die of grief if I were parted from you again ; you can't think how changed I am. I love you and my brother ten times more than I used to do ; I love you, Papa, and Spencer beyond any thing or person I ever did before.' In the earnestness of his child's heart—loving all better than ever, for being again in his natural position towards his mother!—'tis a lesson which, though simply given, is full of truth. I cannot tell you how this letter touched me ; I think I feel as he does, that I love every one better since I received this dear scrawl of affectionate writing. I hope you are well, and that you will be at Broadstairs when you get this and when I arrive. The Phipses have gone to Ramsgate on account of the child who has been ailing. If I can have one room looking on the sea of course I should prefer it, and as it is so late in the season perhaps this can be accomplished. My boys will be with me again at Christmas, and then you will let me bring them to you.

"Yours affectionately

"CAROLINE NORTON.

"I have not had one moment to write while they were with me."

A lovely little poem of hers which appeared in the *Fisher's Drawing-room Scrap-book* of 1848 may well be quoted as conclusion to this chapter.

#### "THE SONS OF THE DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH. 1848.

"Oh, fair ye are, young playmates, and welcome to my sight,  
With your glad eyes full of sunshine, and innocent delight.  
Not for your noble lineage—though in those lovely sons,  
The best blood of all Scotland, its course unsullied runs,

But for that ye are children, and in life's dawning hour,  
Beauty and love and happiness, seem perfect in their power  
Oh, give me children's voices, the sweet, the clear, the kind,  
Their bursts of merry laughter that float upon the wind ;  
Give me the tranquil glory that shines from children's eyes,  
Their eager, restless questions, their playful, keen replies,  
The freedom of their charity, the fervour of their prayers  
(Which I hear like one who may be guest of 'angels unawares'),  
Their sympathy with sorrow, their ignorance of sin,  
And their wiles to be 'first favourite'—the utmost love to win !  
How often from the elder world, whose path is set with thorns,  
Its cares, its struggles—and its woes, its heartburnings, and scorns,  
My soul hath taken refuge within the wayside bowers,  
Where peace and welcome wooed me still, from children and from  
flowers.

Oh, fair befall ye, little ones ! Be happy, little men !  
A blessing follow all your steps, o'er mountain, rock, and glen.  
A blessing rest on all your paths, along the lone hillside,  
The trees that have o'ershadowed you, the blue lake's placid tide ;  
A blessing on the heathery tracks which saw your frolic play,  
And the moss ye climbed to gather, by the torrent's foaming spray ;  
A blessing on your waking, in the glorious morning light,  
And a blessing on your sleeping in the calm, soft hush of night !  
And when, oh, lovely children, your northern home you see,  
Look round on all the distant hills and greet them thus from me—  
Say far away in England a little grave is green,  
Of one who roamed those Highland tracts, with spirit fresh and keen,  
And when within the English grave we laid our early dead,  
We sent for flowers from Scotland to bloom above his head.  
He perished young. Oh ! noble boys, may ye all live to prove  
Strong men—good hearts—and blessings to the country of your love' ;  
May ye preserve, through all life's years of mingled joy and pain,  
A childlike faith in holy things, and prayers not taught in vain,  
A childlike reverence and trust in manhood's fearless heart,  
Nor from that strength of earlier years, in later times depart,  
But keep the name renowned so long in song and ancient story,  
The name of Scott, the proudest still, in Scottish themes of glory."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DREAM—THE CHILD OF THE ISLANDS—FISHER'S DRAWING-ROOM SCRAP BOOK

IN pursuing to its end the story of Mrs. Norton's separation from her children, it has been necessary to leave out much that is essential in any complete account of her. It will be well, therefore, to turn back now for a year or two, to pick up the more important of these lost links.

In the early summer of 1840, a year after the passage of the "Infant Custody Bill," we find her again before the public as a writer of graceful verse. "The Dream and Other Poems" was the name of this last collection, in a fine octavo volume published by H. Colburn, Great Marlborough Street, illustrated with a portrait of herself by Landseer. The great animal painter was not so good at human likenesses, and though he gives the poise of her head upon her shoulders better than Hayter or Maclise succeeded in doing, the picture is not especially convincing, and is chiefly interesting as a witness of the new-made friendship between the painter and the poetess, a friendship still evident in the mass of clever sketches and caricatures found among her papers with the great man's sign across them.

The principal poem of this collection, "The Dream," is the same she had already offered to Murray in 1834 under a slightly different name—a long, meditative piece, narrating a young maiden's dream of happiness



MRS. NORTON.

From an engraving by F. C. Lewis, after the drawing by Sir Edwin Landseer, R.A  
p. 174]



with an ideal mate, and her mother's counsels on her approaching marriage, in a fashion so long gone by that it would find few readers now, in spite of the real beauty of many of its passages.

"Twilight" is one of her shorter poems, often chosen to represent her in collections of British poets. I will only mention it, therefore, as a touching bit of autobiography, drawn from her first dreary years without her children, as is also "The Fever Dream," from which I have already quoted. "A Destiny" is another short narrative poem. These and a few graceful but incorrect sonnets make up nearly all that is new in the book, which was very favourably reviewed in the current number of the *Quarterly* for 1840 by Hartley Coleridge, who names its author first of ten other British poetesses, all lost to memory now except Miss Barrett, who was placed second in the list. In this notice Mrs. Norton is given her famous title, "The Byron of Modern Poetesses."

But she was not too overwhelmed by the honour to make a little fun of the fantastic form of the criticism, each authoress in the article of Mr. Coleridge being distinguished by a special flower—a rose, a violet, or a lily, etc., as the case might demand.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. NORTON TO JOHN MURRAY

24, BOLTON STREET, October 31, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,

"I ought to have thanked you from Ventnor, instead of waiting till my return to town, for your kindness in sending me an early copy of the *Quarterly*, containing all that comfortable flattery respecting 'The Dream.' I assure you I felt almost ashamed at seeing my name 'first on the list called over,' but very grateful for the indulgent spirit in which the article was written, and would be glad to know to which of your *Slaves of the Lamp* I stand indebted. I was conscious of the egoism of the volume when I saw, collected into that form, the many scattered occasional pieces, added to the principal poem.

I hope to do better yet, and will carefully avoid any faults that have been pointed out.

“As to ‘V.’ (one of the list of poetesses), you have, of course, been made aware that she is since engaged to be married to Mr. C., a very handsome, agreeable, well-informed clergyman (as I hear). Now, as she is forty, nothing shall persuade me that the proposal and the marriage are not the result of the review. All the single ladies noticed in that article should instantly think of changing their names, retaining merely the floral name allotted to them in the *Quarterly*. I half wish I could change mine (especially since Mrs. Erskine Norton has ingeniously taken to playing at being me to all the publishers); but I dare say I should not change it to my satisfaction at this time of day, though I want ten years of ‘V.,’ and ‘V.’ is very little and very lame, and has not (as I am credibly informed) nearly such a straight nose as I have.

“Her poetry is wonderful; I hardly believed it was a woman’s at first.

“If the author of the article knew Lady Emeline Wortley, he would be too much in love with her to be able to laugh at her. She is the truest, simplest woman that ever was bit by romance; but you are an infidel, and don’t believe in women because your Byron wrote some clever lines against the sex—yet how was so profligate a man to know good women?

“Not that I defend my lady’s high-flown language and starry sublimities ‘at all times’; but she is so gentle, and earnest, and real, that I feel a little unhappy when I read the review. Poisoned daggers are a joke to being laughed at in the *Quarterly*.

“Believe me, dear sir,

“Yours very truly obliged,

“CAROLINE NORTON.”

The book was very popular for a time. Its first edition was quickly exhausted; a second followed with a characteristic preface interesting to Americans in its reference to the piratical customs of American publishers and editors before the days when Copyright in the United States was given to foreigners.

"A compliment has been lately paid me on the other side of the Atlantic, which I confess I have received very unwillingly. I allude to the printing of my published poem in an American paper, a huge mammoth, a very boa-constrictor of a paper, which has contrived to swallow it all. Now, anxious as I naturally am to become acquainted with, and popular among, my friends in 'the Far West,' yet, if it so pleased them, I could wish to be more formally introduced. I would fain not appear before Bryant's countrymen and fellow-citizens in such a very careless undress; indeed, this sort of dealing is hard, both as respects author and publisher in England, etc.

"Of a still more equivocal nature is the compliment (if compliment it can be called) of printing and publishing poems as mine which are not from my pen, and of whose authorship I know nothing. These poems may be as good, or better than those which I am in the habit of writing, but they are not mine, and therefore I would rather they were not attributed to me. Moreover, the 'Melancholy Musings' given to me by no means express my real sentiments. I am thankful to say that I still believe in 'Love' and 'Friendship' quite as firmly as in the outset of my life; and that far from taking that saucily high tone with the 'meteor Fame,' and treating her with a sort of despairing contempt, I am reasonably anxious that what I write should be read and approved of; willing to take all pains to attain that desirable end; and at this moment full of hope and interest respecting the success of this very volume, and the chance of my having, perhaps, to correct a third edition through the indulgence of my readers."

She was not disappointed. The results of 'The Dream,' from a pecuniary point of view, must have been very satisfactory. She writes to Mrs. Shelley the same autumn:

"In three weeks I am to set up the magnificence of a one-'orse shay myself, and then Fulham and the various streets of London, where friends and foes live, will become attainable; at present I have never stirred over the threshold since I came up from Brighton."

There were other things besides the one-horse shay which made this year seem a kind of turning-point in her favour. She had not been received at Court since 1835, when all three Sheridan sisters made their courtesy to Queen Adelaide at the Drawing-Room after their brother's elopement. But at one of the May Drawing-Rooms of 1840 she was permitted to enjoy this outward and visible sign of the complete social rehabilitation she had undergone during the years since her husband's repudiation of her. She was presented by her sister Lady Seymour, and we even know how she was dressed, if the *Court Journal* is correct in its account of her: “Isle of Wight lace over white satin, with flowers and lappets to correspond; train of pale lilac Irish poplin, lined with white gros de Naples, and trimmed with lace; head-dress wreaths of lilac flowers, with pearl piquets intermixed, and plumes of ostrich feathers.” It was well her beauty was still the kind “à faire voir aux ambassadeurs”; enough in itself to make a sort of triumph of this return to Court; for there were enemies as well as friends in the reception she met there—great Tory ladies who continued to behave as if the verdict for Lord Melbourne had never been given.

And she was frightened when she made her first courtesy to the young Queen, so evidently so that the Queen noticed it and spoke of it afterwards to her uncle and Mrs. Norton's old friend, Leopold, King of the Belgians, drawing from him the following cautious commendation in reply:

“It was a very generous feeling which prompted you to see Mrs. Norton, and I have been too much her friend to find fault with it.

“True it is that Norton was freely accepted by her, but she was very poor, and could, therefore, hardly venture to refuse him. Many people will flirt with a clever, handsome, but poor girl, though not marry her; besides, the idea of having old Sherry for a

grandfather had nothing very captivating. A very unpleasant husband Norton certainly was, and one who had little tact.

"I can well believe that she was much frightened, having so many eyes on her, some of which, perhaps, not with the most amiable expression."

Indeed, when we remember the Queen's usual attitude towards women who were unfortunate enough to have drawn the public attention upon any irregularity in their marriage relations, it must be inferred from her gracious reception of Mrs. Norton on this and many other occasions that she wished to be just to an injured woman, and believed her friendship with Lord Melbourne to have been innocent.

But the Queen was about to lose Lord Melbourne by a natural reversal of the fate which had already deprived Mrs. Norton of the same society; for in September 1841 the Whigs were driven from office, and Queen Victoria had to receive Sir Robert Peel in the place of her good old friend. She made no secret of her regret for her loss; and Sir John Campbell, who had also lost office, shows all that melancholy satisfaction we so often feel in the contemplation of another person worse off than ourselves, in his prophecy as to Lord Melbourne's sentiments in the matter.

"I called on Melbourne this morning between twelve and one. I found him shaving. This was his levée; I said I came to offer my congratulations on his release from the cares of office, and that I hoped he was happy.

"'Oh! very happy.' He smiled, but in such sort! In truth he will feel it more than any of us. He not only loses the occupation and excitement of office, but his whole existence is changed. With him it is as if a man were to have his wife and children torn from him when he falls from power. He consorted constantly with the Queen on the most easy and delightful footing, and he is continually banished from her

presence. I know not what will become of him. The shadow of the trees at Brocket will be very funereal."

But in this, as in so many other of his judgments upon the men and motives of his time, Sir John Campbell seems to have been mistaken. As he acknowledges himself:

"I yesterday met Melbourne at dinner at Lady Holland's. He was very gay, and I begin to think he will carry it off the best of us all."

Charles Greville remarks further on the same subject :

"As soon as he was out, he resumed his old habits : Holland House, Lady Palmerston ! There he loved to lounge and sprawl at his ease, pouring out a rough but original stream of talk, shrewd, playful, and instructive."

And we have plenty of evidence that "Palazzo Boltoni," as Mrs. Norton sometimes amused herself by calling her new home with her uncle, was another of the homes where he was often and pleasantly found in these latter days.

But hardly more than a year after his fall from office, Lord Melbourne had a slight stroke of paralysis, which prevented him for some months from appearing in public,

"And when he again occupied his accustomed seat in the Lords, though his features were little altered and he could walk supported by his staff, slightly dragging one leg, there was no speculation in his eye ; sometimes when he spoke his voice was broken as if he had been going to burst into tears."<sup>1</sup>

From that time on till his death there was a slow decay of both mind and body. He is described thus tenderly by one of his own family :

<sup>1</sup> Lord John Campbell's "Autobiography."

"A somewhat massive, though not corpulent figure reclining in an armchair, a white or nearly white head, shaggy eyebrows, and a singularly keen and kindly eye, fits of silence, occasionally broken by an incisive and rather paradoxical remark, accompanied by a genial laugh and a rubbing of the hands together. I remember also noticing how easily the tears came into his eyes, not so much, as I have heard it said, at anything tender or affecting as at the expression of a noble or generous sentiment: a shattered invalid, very little left of the exuberant vitality which has been noted as one of his marked characteristics."

He was able to the end, however, to enjoy society, and was flattered and pleased when new men wanted to meet him. His old, yet new, relations with Mrs. Norton through this latter part of his life speak for themselves in the following extract from the diary of the actor Macready:

"Mrs. Norton has sent a note inviting us to meet Lord Melbourne at her house to-morrow, as he wishes to speak with me about the theatre."

*August 22.*

"Dined with Mrs. Norton. Met Lady Conyngham, Lord Melbourne, Sidney Herbert, Kohl, and the Sheridans. Rogers came in the evening."

These little dinners at "Palazzo Boltoni" were sometimes more than mere social occasions. I speak of one, especially described by Fanny Kemble back in England in 1841, with her American husband, Mr. Butler, which Mrs. Norton had made the opportunity for—

"A certain shy, silent, rather rustic gentleman from the far-away province of New Brunswick, Mr. Samuel Cunard, afterwards Sir Samuel Cunard, of the great mail-packet line of steamers between England and America. He had come to London an obscure and humble individual, endeavouring to procure from the Government the sole privilege of carrying the trans-

Atlantic mails for his line of steamers. Fortunately for him, he had some acquaintance with Mrs. Norton, and the powerful beauty, who was kind-hearted and good-natured to all but her natural enemies (*i.e.* the members of her own London society), exerted all her interest with her admirers in high places in favour of Cunard, and had made this very dinner for the express purpose of bringing her provincial *protégé* into pleasant personal relations with Lord Lansdowne and Lord Normanby, who were likely to be of great service to him in the special object which had brought him to England. The only other individual I remember at the dinner was that most beautiful person, Lady Harriet d'Orsay.

“Years after, when the Halifax projector had become Sir Samuel Cunard, he reminded me of this charming dinner, in which Mrs. Norton had so successfully found the means of forwarding his interests, and spoke with enthusiasm of her kind-heartedness as well as her beauty and talents. He, of course, passed under the ‘Caudine Forks,’<sup>1</sup> beneath which all men encountering her had to bow and throw down their arms.”

But such pleasant entertainments in Bolton Street had to suffer many sad interruptions. On July 20, 1841, while crossing by steamer to Ireland, the husband of Helen Sheridan, Lord Dufferin, died suddenly from the effects of an overdose of a sedative, his wife being still abroad, in delicate health, at Castellamare.

In September of the following year came the fatal accident to little William Norton; and just a year afterwards the news of the death of Frank Sheridan, treasurer of the British colony at Mauritius, of consumption; followed in November of the same autumn by the death of Charles Sheridan the elder, almost as premature as those preceding it, for he was hardly fifty when he died—a very kind and courteous gentleman and no mean scholar, though lacking in the

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Kemble shows here her lack of a classical education. It was at the Caudine Pass, during the Samnite war, that the Roman army was made to “pass under the yoke.”

brilliant qualities which have made other members of his race so remarkable.

On his decease most of his moderate fortune went to his nephew and namesake Charles, at that time Secretary at the British Embassy in Paris; and his niece, who owed so much of the comparative peace and security of her life since her separation from her husband to her uncle's generous protection, was again obliged to find a new home.

There is an undated note from her to Mrs. Shelley, written probably the summer succeeding her uncle's death, and, if so, telling her first effort to find a new place of abode for herself after Bolton Street was given up.

"I have moved myself bag and baggage to 16, Norfolk Street, Park Lane; through the grating of my prison bars I drop this note, hoping some friendly passer-by will charitably carry it to its destination. Written this detestable smoking day of August at about a quarter to two p.m."

But in July 1845 we find her finally settled at No. 3, Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, the little house which was to be her home in London for more than thirty years to come. It has been somewhat altered of late years, enlarged by another storey, its dull brick front somewhat diversified from the dead level of those many little London houses which lined the narrow streets of Mayfair during the thirties and forties. But it still stands, for those who like to go and look at it and please themselves with the thought that it is not so utterly changed as to prevent that good company which once gathered in its threadbare, much-encumbered little drawing-room, from finding their way back and making a shift to feel at home there, if some spell should ever bring them back from their graves.

There is another of Mrs. Norton's letters to Mrs. Shelley, written, it is true, rather earlier than the date

of this new departure, but more appropriate here where it is the writer, not Mrs. Shelley, who is looking for a new domicile.

“With respect to your house in Berkeley Street, I think it would be most childish to give up a good and cheap house because a ‘fie-fie’ had lived in it, which, I suppose, is the English of the ‘associations.’ My uncle says he never heard of such an objection; but he is not the best person to ask. If it is any satisfaction to you to know that they thought to deter me from taking a house in Hereford Street by telling me there were two houses of that sort in the same street, and that I obstinately persisted in thinking the neighbourhood as good as when the houses do not acknowledge themselves (as in Grosvenor Square), you have that bright example before you. I really think these sort of objections absurd, and if you consider them otherwise, you will never get a small, cheap, and pretty house at the west end of the town, for such houses are the natural prey of such persons; and ever and anon they hire them and put parrots’ cages and geraniums into the balcony, which they paint green. But if you act discreetly and modestly, that is, if you paint the rails dark green and don’t buy a parrot, and are contented with two geraniums inside the drawing-room, the barrenness of virtue will be apparent, and the house will be as good as if its face was built out of the sorrowful and remorseful bricks of the Millbank Penitentiary.”

But though her Irish blood was sure to go on dancing amid all the distractions and bereavements that were continually disturbing her life, she suffered none the less from these, in her health and in her work. Since 1841 she had been engaged on “The Child of the Islands,” a longer, more ambitious poem than anything she had yet attempted. She herself explains in the preface of the volume, which appeared early in 1845, some of the causes which so long retarded its publication.

"Had I been able to carry out my original plan, the volume now published would have appeared on November 9, 1842, being the first anniversary of the birth of His Royal Highness. The recurrence of domestic affliction in two consecutive autumns compelled me to relinquish the literary tasks in which I was engaged; and I abandoned all thoughts of publishing at that particular time."

It was still further delayed by an illness of her own in the late autumn of 1844, which kept her from finishing it until too late for the Christmas sales, as she ruefully remarks to her sister, Lady Seymour, who was spending that winter in Paris.

She was always most eager to support and enlarge her early reputation for poetic genius—a word more freely used in those days than now. She had written to reproach her old friend Rogers for having spoken of her as the author of "Fugitive Pieces," signing herself "Yours dutifully, the author of 'Fugitive Pieces.' Ah, little did I think you would have sacrificed me, your friend, for a 'bon mot.' All night their paper ghosts have bowed to me, saying 'We are Fugitive Pieces! We are Fugitive Pieces!'"

Certainly after the production of "The Child of the Islands" no one could ever so designate her again. It was a very long poem in four parts—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter—addressed to the Prince of Wales (to quote from her own preface), "as the most complete existing type of a peculiar class—a class born into the world of very various destinies, with all the certainty human prospects can give of enjoying the blessings of this life without incurring any of its privations. I selected the Prince of Wales as my illustration, because the innocence of his age, the hopes that hallow his birth, and the hereditary loyalty which clings to the throne, concur in enabling men of all parties, and of every grade of society, to contemplate such a type, not only without envy but with one common feeling of earnest good-

will. Nor will the presence of this goodwill weaken the contrast or destroy the argument. It is, on the contrary, a gleam of that union and kindness of feeling between the higher and lower classes which it is the main object of the writer of these pages to inculcate—a gleam which may fade into darkness or brighten into sunshine, but which no one who attentively observes the present circumstances of this country can believe will remain unaltered.”

She sent the following letter to Rogers with a copy of the poem :

“I send you a book, the book, my book! I know you will not read it, but peep into it for the sake of the writer. I have marked two episodes—the death of a gipsy girl in prison and the description of a ballet dance. Don’t lend it to anybody, because I depend on it for some bread and butter.

“P.S.—A friend of mine, interrupting me, declares that I have not marked the best passages, and has marked one of his own selecting; you may play at pitch-and-toss to decide which you may read; only remember ‘England expects every man will do some portion of his duty.’ The last sentence written on a scroll flying from a mast.”

The book was warmly reviewed in the *Edinburgh Review* for July, by her personal friend, Abraham Hayward, who begins by calling it “great poetry, true poetry!” Great poetry it was not. Hardly poetry at all, if we judge it by the standard of works that immediately preceded and followed it: “In Memoriam,” “Sordello,” “The Strayed Reveller,” etc. And yet we must concede to it something more than mere rhymed facility, something as real and beautiful as herself—that very mortal beauty, never to be denied, even by those who deny her immortality.

Taken at this human valuation, there will always be a great deal of charm and interest in “The Child of the Islands,” a great deal of the quality of the author, in fact—her frank, generous nature, her hatred of sham,

her audacity—not so much of thought as of fidelity to her own impressions—impressions almost always fresh-coined from her own experience. For in all that long poem there is hardly a description, or an incident, or an analogy which cannot be traced back directly to something her eyes had seen, her ears had heard, or her heart felt.

The one pleasant thing we know about George Norton is her reference to him in a note appended to a certain passage to prove that the pathetic incident therein narrated was founded on an actual fact. After the death of his little boy in 1842, when he had asked his wife and she had refused to come back to him, he had fallen back into quasi-friendly relations with her, making her occasional visits at her uncle's house and afterwards at her own; and in that partial renewal of familiar intercourse he evidently had talked to her about his experiences in the Whitechapel division of the police magistracy, to which he had some time been transferred from Lambeth, where the wretchedness of the poor people seems to have impressed him with pity. In fact, the first case which made the public aware of the miserable wages of poor sewing-women came up and received notice in his division. Another of his experiences on the Bench is also given by his wife.

The captain of a merchant vessel, who was brought before Mr. Norton for attempting to commit suicide, after a long struggle with adverse fortune, was relieved from the poor-box; and some encouraging advice was given him by the magistrate. Three or four years afterwards he returned with the amount, and stated that he had begun again as a sailor before the mast, and had again become master. He said the magistrate had "put a new heart into him."

The following passage is chosen, one of many, as an example of the graceful, tender sentiment which shows her poetry at its best, and which is often at its best in this long poem :

“ . . . . On how many graves  
 Rests at this hour their first cold winter’s snow ?  
 Wild o’er the earth the sleetish tempest raves ;  
 Silent our lost ones slumber on below,  
 Never to share again the genial glow  
 Of Christmas gladness round the circled hearth ;  
 Never returning festivals to know,  
 Or holidays that mark some loved one’s birth,  
 Or children’s joyous songs, and loud, delighted mirth.

“ The frozen tombs are sheeted with one pall,  
 One shroud for every churchyard, crisp and bright,  
 One foldless mantle, softly covering all  
 With its unwrinkled width of spotless white.  
 There, through the grey dim day and starlit night,  
 It rests on rich and poor, and young and old,  
 Veiling dear eyes, whose warm home-cheering light  
 Our pining hearts can never more behold,  
 With an unlifiting veil, that falleth blank and cold.

“ And there rests one, whom none on earth remember  
 Except that heart whose fond life fed its own :  
 The cherished babe, who through this bleak December,  
 Far from the mother’s bosom lieth lone,  
 Where the cold north wind makes its wintry moan.  
 A bird whose song beyond the cloud is gone ;  
 A child whose empty cradle is bedewed  
 By bitter falling tears in hours of solitude.

“ Ah, how can death untwist the chord of love,  
 Which bid those parted lives together cling ?  
 Prest to the bosom of that brooding dove,  
 Into those infant eyes would softly spring  
 A sense of happiness and cherishing ;  
 The tender lips knew no completed word,  
 The small feet could not run for tottering,  
 But a glad silent smile the red mouth stirred,  
 And murmurs of delight whene’er her name was heard.

“ Oh ! darling, since all life for death is moulded,  
 And every cradled head some tomb must fill,  
 A little sooner only hast thou folded  
 Thy helpless hands, that struggled and are still :  
 A little sooner, thy Creator’s will  
 Hath called thee to the life that shall endure :  
 And in that heaven, His gathered saints shall fill,  
 Hath made thy calling and election sure.  
 His work in thee being done, was thy death premature ? ”

Immediately after the appearance of "The Child of the Islands," Mrs. Norton became editor of *Fisher's Drawing-room Scrap-book* one of the last survivals of the annuals of her youth, but differing thus much from the *English Annual* and the *Keepsake*, of which she had also been editor, that in this later publication the editor was also supposed to be the sole contributor. The years of 1846, '47, '48, and '49 of the *Scrap-book*, form, therefore, a sort of collection of her own poetry, profusely and beautifully illustrated by steel engravings, reproductions of famous pictures, or country seats, or beauties, the engravings, however, being arbitrarily furnished by the publishers who happened to be backing the enterprise, the poetry to be added as appropriately as possible.

One may imagine that poetry called into being by such very formal suggestion could not always be of a very high grade—must often have hardly been poetry at all; yet perhaps these very conditions best fitted the discursive fluency, the picturesque imagination of Mrs. Norton's verse; certainly, the most beautiful, as well as the least known, of Mrs. Norton's shorter pieces are found in this collection.

She must have written with great facility, for these four volumes are by no means the sum of her literary activity during these four years. Besides several collections of songs, both words and music, published by Chappell, one is constantly coming across short stories by her in the current magazines—of very uneven merit, indeed, but none without some touch of her natural charm.

And any account of her at this time would be incomplete without some mention of her interest in the hopes and apprehensions which were invading all Europe as the great revolutionary outbreak of 1848 approached nearer and nearer. During the Chartist disturbances of 1848 her "Letters to the Mob" appeared successively in the *Morning Chronicle*, a Peelite paper owned by Sidney Herbert and the Duke of

Newcastle. They were afterwards collected and published in a little tract, very rare to-day, but well worth reading, if only to remind one of a side in her too often forgotten in the estimate of her attraction for every clever man who came anywhere near her.

Another interest in her writings on these subjects is the constant proof they give of a type of mind quite other than that which one would naturally attribute to a woman of her reputation, a mind ardent and humane, appealed to by all generous and noble impulses, but practical rather than speculative, appreciative rather than imaginative, eminently reasonable, with a kind of constructive good sense—which makes one wonder whether if she had been a man she would not have made a greater mark on her generation as a political leader than she did as a woman and a poet.

## CHAPTER XV

NEW FRIENDS—KINGLAKE—THE DUFF GORDONS—SIDNEY HERBERT—THE REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS—RELATIONS WITH HER CHILDREN

CAROLINE NORTON was not thirty-seven when she went to live alone in Chesterfield Street. Beautiful, impulsive, and unconventional, it was impossible she should not have drawn down upon herself some portion of that blame which is so easily expended upon a woman separated from her husband, who still desires to please, and has a natural liking for men's society. Some of the gossip talked about her was, no doubt, quite groundless ; though for some it is possible that she herself gave occasion if not actual material.

It would have been strange indeed if she had not sometimes grown restive under the endless prohibitions of her lot, that woman's divorce of which she was one day to speak so bitterly :

“Alone. Married to a man's name, but never to know the protection of this nominal husband, nor the joys of family, nor the every-day companionship of a real home. Never to feel or show preference for any friend not of her own sex, though tempted, perhaps, by a feeling nobler than passion—gratitude for generous pity, that has lightened the dreary days. To be slandered, tormented, insulted ; to find the world and the world's law utterly indifferent to her wrongs or her husband's sin ; and through all this to lead a chaste, unspotted, patient, cheerful life ; without

anger, without bitterness, and with meek respect for those edicts which, with a perverse parody on Scripture, pronounce that it ‘is not good for man to be alone,’ but extremely good for woman.”

Perhaps it was as well that she was so scourged with adversity during those first years of her solitary existence and that she had to work so hard—exhausting mental work, often the merest drudgery, but often, too, that most exciting and absorbing occupation of literary creation, which raises one, for the moment at least, to a different plane—a higher plane, perhaps, than that of mere desire.

The winter immediately after her uncle’s death would have been, perhaps, the loneliest she ever spent, if she had not had this work. During all this period she was especially busy upon her poem, “The Child of the Islands,” and, at least during their holidays, she had her children. But besides her more permanent losses, she was at this time separated from both Lady Seymour and Lady Dufferin, who were spending that year in Paris, and Mrs. Sheridan with them.

She writes to Lord Melbourne from St. Leonards-on-Sea, in November 1844, to urge, as usual, somebody else’s claim to be helped :

“ How can you turn such a deaf ear and such a turned-up nose to the claims of old Jack Morris ? Why don’t you help the man who helped your brother at Westminster, in the good old days when you weren’t weak and sick and he wasn’t faint and starving ? Do you think the God who made Jack Morris and you does not judge it for selfishness, something also, perhaps, of ingratitude ? For, no doubt, when he had his riches, and his twenty-stall stable, and his Westminster votes, very civil words you all said to him. Oh, rouse your sluggish old heart to write to some one for him ; and don’t fly in the face of Heaven, who built up your face into the picture of honesty and generosity, thereby (alas !) creating much mistaken trust and vain expectation in the hearts of all those whose ill-judging eyes have gazed on your countenance.

"Why don't you write? Who have you got at Brocket? Does Emily<sup>1</sup> hang her long gowns up, like banners of victory, in the cupboards? Does Lady Holland cut herself in four to help and serve you? Are Fanny Jocelyn's<sup>2</sup> soft purple eyes at your table under the lamps? Or does the Minny<sup>3</sup> who rivals our own Georgy, rouse you to any love and admiration of your own relations?

"Adieu. I am extremely busy, yet I write to you. You are not busy, yet you do not write to me. I abjure the world, and will sell all I have and give to the poor. To-morrow is Brin's birthday, and we have ordered roast pig for dinner."

Another note to Lord Melbourne, written three weeks later, is as follows:

"Pray do write. I am ill in bed myself, and if you don't write I shall think you are ill in bed too. I did imagine I had coaxed you into scribbling by asking you that information for my poem [“The Child of the Islands”]. You always say you are glad to teach me things and supply me with scraps of knowledge. How shall I get on if I am so neglected by my tutor?

"The boys' tutor, whose name is Mr. Murray, and who is curate, is the first gentleman of Scotch extraction I ever met who knew nothing whatever about his clan or his family. In general they will ferret you out their roots (to say nothing of their branches) with the sagacity of truffle-dogs; but here is a fellow who asks what Dunmore's title is, and who is the elder branch of the Murray clan.

"There is a passage in my poem about the Church disturbances in Scotland, against those who want to elect their own ministers. Breadalbane wanted me to leave it out, but I have been obstinate. I told him what you had said about the difference between being in and out of office. He laughed very much, and said he should send you a whole deer to make up."

The illness she speaks of was serious enough to put

<sup>1</sup> Lady Ashley's daughter.

<sup>2</sup> Lady Fanny Cowper.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Ashley, Lady Palmerston's eldest daughter.

off her new book till after the Christmas sales, but we hear of her late in January at a dinner in the shadowy dining-room of the poet Rogers, the only woman invited to meet seven men, among whom were Alfred Tennyson and Crabb Robinson and Moxon the publisher; arriving, as was too often her custom, very late, but very agreeable, quite able to hold her own in that society of poets and publishers.

And there were other dinners that winter in Hayward's old chambers in the Temple, and gatherings afterwards in the room, "stern with yellowish law-books," that stood in the place of a drawing-room.

And an evening in her own house was made memorable by the discussion which raged between Lockhart and Hayward as to the standing of literary men in London society, where feeling ran so high that it had to be assuaged next day by a shower of notes, notably one from herself to her sharp-tempered little friend.

"*March 6, 1844.*

"SULKY, BLACK-HEARTED AVOCAT,

"I have partially recovered from my amazement that you should say such unjust and bitter things about my want of generosity, etc. If this is a Queen Bee you had better say so, and I will go and call and coax her, and we will sit together (as much as she will permit), and ask her here. If you were as gentle as your friend Kinglake you would have understood better what we all said, and what Lockhart especially meant, and all that I supported of what he said, which you call going against you. You don't deserve to be written to, and I only do it because you are my Avocat. I say again, if you have not persuaded her we burnt her in effigy (for you are a gossip), I will go and see the large brown eyes that, like the eyes of all people of imperfect hearing, have so much plaintive listening in their expression.

"Yours, etc.,  
"C. CLIENT."

Kinglake, the future historian of the Crimean War,

was then just beginning to be known in London society as a clever young barrister who had journeyed extensively in the East and narrated his adventures in a peculiarly delightful book of travels, "Eothen." He was one of the new men by whom the circle in Chesterfield Street was constantly enlarging itself. And it is he, a little later, whom we hear of as host, inviting people to eat whitebait at Greenwich and meet Mrs. Norton, Sir Alexander and Lady Duff Gordon, and Sidney Herbert. One of the guests, the Rev. Mr. Brookfield, the husband of Thackeray's friend, writes thus about it to his wife:

"I should have gone to a dead certainty, and Kinglake vows that there was nothing to hinder you going (for I expressed my doubts), or nothing would have induced him to ask you (which of course he would not), that she visits everywhere, and he himself believes nothing against her. Perhaps she would be described as decidedly pretty, with a Somerset nose; a nice person, very unaffected, and a shade free-and-easy, but it seems only the overflowing of an open disposition."

One sees from this letter that the old slanders were not even then so entirely appeased that they did not need a special refutation for each new acquaintance, whenever the widening circle of her interests carried her out beyond the small class in which she was born.

The Duff Gordons were also new acquaintances of that summer, soon to grow into old friends; indeed, one can think of no two women better fitted for that relation than Lucie Austin and Caroline Norton, both so beautiful, so richly endowed, so free from all petty shams and conventions, both shadowed by a tragic fate.

But all these new interests never seem to have interfered with the old ones. Indeed, it was part of her social instinct to sweep them all along together. For instance, we find the Duff Gordons and Henry Reeve

and Mrs. Norton all in a box together with Lord Melbourne at St. James's Theatre in November of that same year, to see the first representation of Ben Jonson's play *Every Man in His Humour*, acted by some of the writers for *Punch* and other literary men of the time, notably Charles Dickens. We are told that Lord Melbourne found the play very poor, with no  $\mu\bar{\nu}\theta\sigma\varsigma$  in it—that was his expression; till suddenly between the acts he exclaimed in a stentorian voice heard across the pit, "I knew this play would be dull, but that it would be so damnably dull as this I did not suppose."

There is a letter of Mrs. Norton, written this same November to Panizzi, the great librarian of the British Museum, showing her at her old task of providing amusement of the kind he liked best for this same old friend, the ex-Prime Minister :

“CHESTERFIELD STREET,  
“*Friday evening, November 1845.*

“DEAR MR. PANIZZI,

“I met Lord Melbourne at dinner to-day, and mentioned to him having seen you and Mr. Thackeray. He begged me to write for him, to ask you if you would dine with him on Monday, and Mr. Thackeray also. He has asked the Duff Gordons and Mr. Fonblanche for that day. Will you let me know as soon as convenient, and will you, who are an old friend of Lord Melbourne's, explain anything that may seem odd or blunt in his mode of inviting without introduction, though indeed he persists very obstinately that Mr. Thackeray is a clergyman, with whom he is, or ought to be, acquainted. I said I did not think it clerical to write about the Bishop of Bullochesmithy, and that I did not think Mr. Thackeray was a clergyman at all; but this is not of importance in comparison of his coming to dinner at half-past seven, punctual, on Monday.

“I wish you would now and then call on Lord Melbourne, as, since he is invalided, he takes great pleasure in receiving his friends. I think about four o'clock, or a little later, when there is no House of

Lords, is a good moment to find him. Poor Lady Holland's death has deprived him of a very near neighbour, where he could be, without fatigue or form, in pleasant society, and, with all her faults, she had certainly a very real regard for him.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Panizzi,

"Yours sincerely,

"CAROLINE NORTON."

Another name often to be met in any account of Mrs. Norton at this time is that of Sidney Herbert, second son of the Earl of Pembroke by his Russian wife, Catherine Woronzow—a man about thirty-seven, rather young to be a Cabinet Minister, whose high responsibilities, however, did not interfere with his gaiety and charm of temper, or the impulses of a heart most easily touched by suffering in any form—a man among whose natural gifts was beauty so gallant, so distinguished, that it might well have descended upon him from that great hero of his race, Sir Philip Sidney.

London was especially full that autumn of 1845. The failure of the potato crop in the preceding summer had renewed the question of the Corn Laws, which the party in power had come in pledged to preserve. Sir Robert Peel, however, was already suspected of as great a change of mind on this important party question as he had already undergone in the matter of Catholic Emancipation in 1829—for which earlier inconsistency, by the way, Tories of longest memories had never quite forgiven him. But the Protectionists were by no means confined to the Tory party.

Lord Melbourne was bitter against repeal, and deeply prejudiced against the Prime Minister, and so were the greater part of the Whig landed interest. It was generally known that all the Cabinet Ministers had been in town ever since the beginning of November, holding almost daily meetings; and all the world, both Whig and Tory, was eager to know the subject of their deliberations, which were carefully kept con-

sealed, till the tension was suddenly broken by Delane, editor of the *Times*, in his famous leading article of December 4, announcing confidently that the Cabinet was agreed to repeal the Corn Laws; that Parliament was to be immediately convened for that purpose.

Instantly the rumour rushed into circulation that some one had betrayed a Government secret. Nothing, however, was further from the truth.

For many years the *Times* had been, if not a Government organ, at least a very correct medium of Government information, through the relation of its editors—Thomas Barnes, and, on his death, of his successor, John Thaddeus Delane—with persons high in office. In the time of the Whigs, Lord Brougham had sometimes furnished this official information; in Delane's case it was Lord Aberdeen, Foreign Secretary in the Cabinet of Sir Robert Peel. Henry Reeve, best known to us now as the editor of the "Greville Memoirs," was also on the staff of the *Times* in 1845. I quote from Reeve's journal on the subject of the famous leading article of December 4:

"Early in December Peel announced to his colleagues his intention to repeal the Corn Laws. Lord Aberdeen told Delane of this on December 3, and on December 4 the *Times* published it. The agitation was extreme, and Peel resigned on the 6th, but soon came back again."

We may also go to Mr. Reeve's article on George Meredith's novels in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1895 to be assured that the incident where Diana sells a Government secret is "in no way founded on fact, nor even suggested by facts, but by calumnies which were exposed and refuted, though for a time they obtained circulation and a certain credence."

The statement is further emphasised by Mr. Reeve in the same article:

"We observe with regret that the late Sir William

Gregory, in his interesting autobiography, has revived a calumnious and unfounded anecdote, to which Mr. Meredith had previously given circulation in this novel. We are enabled to state, and we do state, from our personal knowledge, that the story is absolutely false in every particular, and that the persons thus offensively referred to had nothing to do with the matter. The intention of the Government to propose the repeal of the Corn Laws was communicated openly by Lord Aberdeen to Mr. Delane, the editor of the *Times*; there was no sort of intrigue or bribery in the transaction."

And, indeed, it seems impossible that it should ever have been believed by any one in close relations with Mrs. Norton.

There have been things equally unkind, unjust, untrue, reported in the past against her, but none, it seems to me, more utterly at variance with what she really was than this last story. Signally impulsive and indiscreet in her own affairs, one can conceive of no more unfit person than she as the repository for an important political secret, though with her proud spirit and generous temper, trained and fortified as it was by intimate association with such men as Lord Melbourne and Sir James Graham, and her own brother-in-law, Lord Seymour, it is not only unlikely, but impossible, that she could have made so base a use of it as George Meredith excuses in the story of a woman in some ways resembling her.

Nor is she the kind of woman to suffer slanderous attacks upon her reputation without some effort to justify herself. She has left, however, no word or sign to show that this particular report ever came near enough to hurt her. On the contrary, we find her writing to Lord Melbourne early in 1846, with a mind so free from more painful preoccupations that she can afford to get very angry with her old friend for misunderstanding a suggestion of hers about some plans which were just then occupying his leisure.

*"Thursday, January 22.*

"I am glad the interest in your gates made you write directly, but you disturbed yourself unnecessarily; I have no enthusiasms which make me forget what you say to me, and you told me at the time all that you have taken the trouble to write per post. If you had read as carefully as I listen, you would have seen that in my letter I mention having promised designs, and that I merely repeat the observations of others when I talk of Baldock and his triumphant entries. It has since struck me that as the place is in fact Mrs. Lamb's (and probably also the projected improvements), her leisure would be well employed and her taste better satisfied by choosing them herself."

Having thus relieved her feelings, she goes on to a light-spirited arraignment of the attitude of her sex on the burning question of the day.

"Mrs. 'S.' does not care about politics for the best of all reasons, which is, that she cannot by any effort be brought to comprehend them, even in the shallow way we women do. She takes them as Helen [Lady Dufferin] does, only that Helen could understand them. Nell's way I will recount.

"Helen was ill in bed; I thought Blank's epistle might amuse her, and took it accordingly. She put out one hand in a languid, deprecating manner, and said: 'Don't look so eager, Caroline; and, above all things, don't read it to me if there are any politics in it, for I know I shall be bored and tired to death.'

"As to S., you are wrong if you think him stupid. He may be wrong-headed, but he is a fine-spirited creature, full of information, though habitually silent; and those who are against you may well be with you. Mrs. S. has a number of set phrases of the 'jobbing' of the Whigs and the 'dishonesty of the Whigs,' etc., but neither for the past nor for the present has she a definite idea."

We catch just a glimpse of her a little later in the year from Lord Malmesbury's Diary:

"March 1846.

"We took a box at the Opera with Lady Seymour, and went afterwards to Lady Palmerston's. Mr. Sidney Herbert was there, and came up to me in a great state of excitement, saying that my conduct in leaving Peel was unworthy a gentleman, that the whole Protectionist party were a set of fools, and Lord S. the greatest fool among us; and that Peel was delighted at having got rid of us. In short, he said everything that was obnoxious. If he had not been in such a frantic passion, I should probably not have been able to keep my temper, but there was something so absurd in his unprovoked attack that I retained perfect command over myself. It was certainly very extraordinary, as I had not spoken to him that evening, or seen him since he came to London, and had given him no provocation whatever. He is generally careful of what he says; in fact, he carries caution to that degree that he is famous for it. We met again at the tea-table that evening, when Mrs. Norton joined us, and by that time Mr. Herbert had recovered his good temper."

Even at this late day we recognise the old Sheridan habit of drifting together into one group in their own and other people's houses, and their old readiness for admiring each other's social qualities. Between 1845 and 1848 Lady Dufferin was also settled in London at 29, Lower Brook Street, where her son was still at school and college.

"There is nothing like her," says Caroline in a letter to a mutual friend. "I mean as to agreeability, for I hold myself quite as valuable a companion in the long run; but I don't think I am fit to whisk the dust off her satin slipper in general society."

And the eldest brother, Brinsley, also made another Sheridan centre in the house in Grosvenor Square, which his wife would have been the last person in the world to speak of as belonging to her rather than to her husband. There is a pretty little glimpse of them

all, given in Sir Henry Taylor's Correspondence, where Mrs. Brinsley is especially noticed :

"I thought her very pretty. They say her beauty has come to her since her marriage, and that it is owing to her connection with the Sheridans. Her eyes are really very fine when one comes to look into them."

A long letter of Mrs. Norton's, written to her mother in the late winter of 1846, with the heading, "Let Marcia read this to you," is another proof of the affectionate intimacy which united all the members of the connection at this time :

"DEAREST MOTHER,

"I am very glad indeed to think poor Charlie is out of his illness; and now he has the spring and summer all before him to get well in, I hope he will pick up flesh and strength. The last two days these lovely little drawing-rooms have been full of sunshine, so I hope even in the country there is fine weather.

"My lads left me yesterday evening, so that here is my first leisure day, and the first day for some weeks the *Times* newspaper has no spell in the column of 'Exhibitions' and 'Holiday Amusements.'

The rest of the letter shows some of the difficulties which continued to confront her in her relations with her children, of whom the elder, at least, was rapidly growing from a boy into a man.

"They are not to be with me next holidays, or a very small portion, as the young Baronet, Sir Robert Menzies [their cousin], is to be married in June to a pretty girl. . . . He goes to Italy immediately after his marriage, to remain some time.

"Meanwhile, he writes and invites the boys to come and 'jubilatify' for a month in the Highlands, immediately on his marriage; and, of course, it is all fair, though I regret not seeing them, and feel some anxiety about Fletcher, to whom they all behave in a manner that would amaze you, if you consider how

little consequence, after all, he ever can assume, and what a good life Norton's is. I know it amazes me, and has been more or less a worry to me these holidays, as James Norton [one of his uncles] is perpetually endeavouring to 'keep him in sight.' He gets him down for a day or two to his place, overwhelms him with civilities, loads him on his return with home-made bread, asparagus, and other things for me, and speaks of me with respectful regret as being so unjustly *acharnée* against him. He also takes him out morning and evening in town, sometimes leaving him to finish his walk alone, which fidgets me and provokes me, because I have sometimes sate till four or five in the afternoon, expecting him back every minute, and not knowing whether to go out or not; and the day I expected him back from the country he remained where he was, on invitation, without his father, contrary to my agreement with Norton, which is, that they shall not visit his family from my house except with him.

"Nothing, meanwhile, can be kinder, more tender, or more sweet-tempered than Fletcher is to me, even in little matters. Last night he sent the servant for cigars; I scolded, but thought no more of it than as a petty vexation: after he was gone, I found on my table, directed to me, the parcel of tobacco I would not take from him. I have nothing to complain of, but he is evidently and naturally won by the great attention paid him by his father's people. His abilities are evidently very good, and he did in two days the task that was given to occupy him for the holidays; 'more's the pity,' thought I, 'to do it so easily and so carelessly.'

"Brinny has, I think, made a great start in mind and character; and there is a sturdy earnestness and unselfishness about him very lovable. I do not know how many uncomfortable mothers have applied to their own sons the beautiful passage put into Queen Constance's mouth by Shakespeare, when speaking of her Arthur; but certainly, except the gift of beauty, which is, after all, only a temptation, I think no woman ever had a more hopeful son than my Brin in everything that nature can bestow. Lately, on the matters I have been scribbling about, he talked to

me as any grown man might have done, and in the language of a grown person. It was when I had waited one day, and I could not help saying at last, 'Dear me, Brin; it will be a great vexation to me if I am to be made a second object in Fletcher's mind to James and your father's relations.' I wish you could have heard Brin, who spoke for eight or ten minutes really in the prepared manner of a man. He said he 'had observed' that I had been annoyed several times, but did not like to broach the subject to me; that he was sure Fletcher loved me as well as he did himself, and preferred my company to that of any human being, but that he was, as *he* considered, 'an awfully weak fellow,' and ashamed to refuse an invitation, or seem under control; that he was a boy in my house, and treated as a man elsewhere, which was a temptation to him, and a temptation that would cease when he was really a man.

"He added as to the people I naturally disliked; but here I will give you his own exact expressions.

"As to those people, mother, I don't think you need be so alarmed about him; for all they say to him is always to defend and excuse themselves about you, and to assure him they do not think ill of you, sometimes that they never did think ill of you, sometimes that they now are convinced they were mistaken. *That* cannot lower you to him. I think it does good; you are never abused to us now. For myself, I draw the line. The lawyers and people of that sort—Kelly, Fladgate—who come to my father's house, I bow to. If they notice me, I show by my manner that I do not wish to be noticed by them. I never talk or laugh with them. . . . I always come back punctually to you the day or hour you expect us; I am not ashamed to give it as my reason, and my only one, for leaving. I have now and then asked Fletcher to be spokesman. I don't like having it always to say, because it makes me appear less fond of my father and his company than Fletcher, but I do it because it must be done.'

"Afterwards, when I said till he was older he could not comprehend all the bitterness I must feel to James and those who helped Norton, he said earnestly: 'Not the exact case perhaps, mother; but oh, I can understand the misery of any disgrace.'"

She goes on to talk about her new engagements with the proprietor of the *Drawing-room Scrap-book* :

" Fisher von der Scrap-book wants to engage me also for a prose Christmas book. Like the old woman who said she had many blessings, but Heaven took it out of her in corns, he has been liberal, but takes it out of me in time ; as he requires my undivided attention to my duties, both for writing and the engravings, and to sit for my own picture an hour a day, and to be painted in miniature on marble—a surface which is delicate, but colder, I think, than ivory."

The letter concludes with an absurd account of some of her housekeeping difficulties :

" I am deeply immersed in those red account books which take up so much of Georgia's time when she leaves town, my cook being about to leave me. She is a worthy and intelligent cook, but loves not to clean my dining-room, and is a most sulky pig and full of dignity ; insomuch that a former fat cook of mine, having sent to say she was dying and hoped I would assist her, she would not give the message to me because the petitioner had asked not for her but for Childe's wife [the wife of Mrs. Norton's coachman], whereupon the fat cook died unassisted. Now it happened that I was fond of that fat cook (a most good-natured old soul, who walked back two hot miles, when she left me, because she had forgotten to say how the racoon was to be fed, that I used to keep). I therefore pronounced a 'commination' on the hard-hearted present cook, and 'hoped she would die in the workhouse, and send a message in vain to some one on whom she depended for assistance.' She showed a most flouncing dignity and no feeling at all, and altogether we could not love each other any more."

## CHAPTER XVI

### NEW QUARREL WITH HER HUSBAND—FLETCHER'S ILLNESS— DEATH OF LORD MELBOURNE

THE spring of 1847 brought new bereavement to the Sheridan family, when the youngest brother, Charles, on whose recovery from illness Mrs. Norton had so earnestly congratulated her mother, died of consumption at the hotel of the British Embassy in Paris, where he had for some time held the position of Secretary of Legation.

His nephew, Lord Dufferin, tells us :

“ He was perhaps the handsomest of all the Sheridan men, and an enchanting companion. Even when already enfeebled by the fell disease which destroyed his father and beautiful grandmother, I remember him sitting in one of the drawing-rooms of the Embassy when a ball was going on, surrounded by a circle of men and ladies, kept away from the dancing by his sallies.”

His death in the thirtieth year of his age was a grief to all that were left of that beautiful group of brothers and sisters, and must have come as a sort of conclusion to the gay story of their youth.

As a frontispiece to *Fisher's Scrap-book* for 1848, we find Mrs. Norton's portrait, a line engraving by Ross, which represents her full-face, with a strange immobility of expression which never could have been really like her. Yet in many ways it seems the most

satisfactory of her many likenesses; the most tragic and yet the most noble. The eyes are wonderful, deep pools of almost brooding sadness. The mouth, with its short upper lip, and full, drooping curves, is very sweet. A frame of dark smooth hair, with the characteristic little velvet band across her forehead, adds to the severity of the outlines. A beautiful face, but no longer that of a very young woman.

And, indeed, the troubles and anxieties peculiar to middle age were already thickening around her. At the time of her brother's death her eldest son, Fletcher Norton, was a youth of nineteen. His cousin, Lord Dufferin, describes him as the one of his generation who showed the most of that peculiar grace and lightness of wit which seems the birthright of the Sheridan family, modified and softened, however, by the most exquisite gentleness and tact. He had been a very delicate child and boy, but his frequent illnesses made even closer the link between him and his mother, whose joy and pride he was; and, as he grew older, he became her intimate and chosen companion. He had inherited many of her gifts—her taste for music, her warm and ready sympathies, her gaiety, tempered, in his case, by a strong religious tendency, even as a boy in Eton. Indeed, it was probably at Eton (very much influenced by the Oxford movement during his last years there) that he received his first impulse towards the Roman Catholic Church, of which he died a member.

It was decided that he should go from Eton directly into diplomacy, and he received his first appointment to one of the minor positions in the British Legation in Lisbon, under Sir Hamilton Seymour, in the autumn of 1847.

The summer before he entered upon his new duties, his mother was permitted to take him abroad with her; no doubt under the conditions usually imposed by her husband on such occasions—that she paid all the expenses of the trip.

The next summer, 1848, he was with her again,

invalided back from Lisbon ; and, indeed, except for his health, it must have been a relief to an anxious mother to have her son safe in England during that year of revolutions abroad.

It was during this same summer of 1848 that George Norton at last approached his wife through his solicitor for her long-desired consent to his plan to raise money on her settlement.

In every climax of this one great subject of discord and disaster between these two people, viz. his obligations for her support, there were plenty of faults on both sides, but always with a difference in her favour.

Her imprudent outbursts against her husband—which seldom took any form but bitter, violent words—seem almost the necessary result of bringing a generous, impulsive nature into unwilling contact with a strangely base, unworthy one ; while he, on his side, never lost a chance of taking advantage of every opportunity afforded him by her angry impatience under his endless withdrawals and double-dealings, to drive a hard, even an unjust bargain with her.

In this case he applied to Fletcher, still invalided home with his mother, to press the desired conditions upon her. Perhaps he did not realise the peculiar aggravation it would be to his wife's spirit to have this boy thus mingled in the haggling and bargaining which had become so hopelessly necessary in all attempts of his parents to come to an understanding. But whether he realised it or not, it entirely served his purpose. As she says herself : "As soon as my son interfered, I made haste to yield : I wrote to Mr. Leman, who acted as solicitor for my trustees, to say that I consented to all Mr. Norton proposed—mainly because it is intolerable to me to have my son talk over matters of this kind from his father."

But this time it was to be a formal regular separation, with all the trustees and safeguards prescribed by custom. And this time it was the gentleman who was

to have been her trustee who declined to be a party to conditions he thought too notoriously unfair to the legally non-existent wife whom he was to represent in the agreement.

Upon this Mrs. Norton, with characteristic impatience and imprudence, declared that if she could not obtain a legal separation, she was perfectly willing to sign any other kind of deed or bond which could be taken as a substitute for it. A deed was accordingly drawn up by Mr. Norton's solicitor.

By this deed she bound herself to give her consent to the mortgage of the trust property, and agreed to certain conditions dictated by her husband, chiefly in regard to his liability for her debts—while he on his part bound himself to pay her a yearly allowance of £500 instead of £400 as heretofore till Lord Grantley's death, when his own succession to the peerage would give an opportunity for a more favourable arrangement for his wife; promising, further, never again to interfere with her affairs.

She was too impatient even to wait in town till the deed was drawn up, but had it sent after her to Scotland for her signature, after it had been signed by Mr. Norton and the solicitor, Mr. Leman. The witness for her signature seems to have been the Hon. Edmund Phipps, a connection by marriage of George Norton and a personal friend of her own.

Her son had by that time returned to his position in Lisbon; but she was still wretchedly unhappy about him, and we find her back in London at the beginning of November writing to Abraham Hayward.

"November 6, 1848.

"DEAR AVOCAT,

"Lord Melbourne, in his letter of this morning, begs me to persuade you to come to Brocket. I am sure if you have leisure you will need no persuading, and having now become *au fait* as to his odd ways, will simply write him a note saying I have immedi-

ately given you his message, and that you could come down for a few days on such a day as he likes, and will come if you hear nothing to the contrary.

"I feel very dreary and disheartened, what with Fletcher's illness and one thing and another. I can't abide to be talked utilitarianism to (on that account). Adieu, good Avocat. We are off on Thursday at latest for tranquil Frampton."

That she had good reason for some of these dreary feelings was proved by the news received by her from Portugal almost immediately after the date of this letter, that her son was seriously ill again, dying perhaps. It was an emergency that could not be met by prudence or practical expediency. She gave up all her engagements with her publishers, her plans for new work, and began to prepare for instant departure for Portugal. Her old friend, Lord Melbourne, was struck with paralysis and died without her ever seeing him again. She received the news of his death two weeks before she sailed, about the middle of December, in the steam-packet which plied between Lisbon and Great Britain. Her younger son, Brinsley, went with her.

But Fletcher did not die. His mother had the extreme happiness of nursing him back to life again. Gradually she saw him grow stronger, able to move from his bed to his sofa, and then to play a little on his guitar and listen to her singing. But he was still far from having recovered, still too weak for the passage home, when she wrote the following letter to Sir Alexander Duff Gordon to congratulate him on the birth of a son.

"LISBON, June 9, 1849.

"DEAR SEMI-HUB,

"I would have delighted in being Maurice's godmother. I thought of asking Lucie, but then I bethought me, 'Lo! 'tis a male child, and a Hidalgo, and there will be some family grandee invited to the dignity of being the fat darling's godmother,' so I desisted.

"I am most glad that Lucie goes on well. How often I wish for you both, I cannot say; sometimes selfishly, for me, sometimes for your own sakes. Fletcher is too weak, Harry Howard too lazy and dispirited to see any of the sights of Lisbon, and Brownie (hear it, oh *Punch*) is too fine to like walking with me and my donkey, and says 'ladies in a foreign capital' ought not to ride donkeys. Often I am reduced to converse with the faithful Childe [Mrs. Norton's maid] who, after a pause, thus renews the topics of the day: 'I beg your pardon, ma'am, but is it true Her Majesty has been shot at?' 'I beg your pardon, ma'am, but there is most astonishing shabby turnouts among the noblemen's carriages in this country,' an observation which chimes in with my own opinions, and which I therefore receive with the more cordiality.

"I had a woman friend, very intelligent; but what with her constant rehearsals for private theatricals and performances of love (already some years rehearsed) with a velvet-eyed Spanish attaché here, I see little of her.

"The Pope's nuncio is a great friend, but he has bursts of absence (during which, I believe, he does penance for our interviews—to no purpose), reappearing gay, boyish, and sinful, like an otter coming up to breathe.

"The Portuguese society is stiff and disjointed—indeed, it ain't jointed at all—only stiff; every one civil, smiling, and apparently anxious, if they knew how, to *lier amitié* with you, but never an inch nearer. A Portuguese gentleman told me it was not unusual to see a lady in the winter and dance with her several nights, and never meet her again till the winter after. They hardly ever visit, or receive visits—never men, at least in very few Portuguese families. The women meet with apparent cordiality, kiss each other, and then sit down in a formal row, never stir afterwards the whole evening, and seldom speak even to those they have just embraced. Nobody reads or writes. They sing sometimes, and always look out of the window. I am sure it is good for the eyes to be ignorant, and to stare out of the window, for oh, the pretty eyes I see here among the women!—the look of mingled laziness,

curiosity, and passion, which replaces the English intelligence and good behaviour of expression. I think the Infanta's daughter, Comtesse Quinarès, has the most beautiful eyes that ever opened on the world, like pools among the dead brown autumn leaves on a warm summer night, with stars looking down into them.

“Love to Lucie and the children.

“Your affectionate  
“CARRY.”

But though able to make such amusing material of her experiences in Portugal while writing to her friends, there was much to make that winter of exile a time of very bitter memories for her.

It was hardly to be expected that her husband would be any special help or comfort on such an occasion, fond and proud as he seems to have been of his eldest son. For emergency always seemed to bring out the meaner side of this strange, selfish being with whom her own life was so fatally entangled.

He allowed his wife to bear all the extraordinary expenses entailed by Fletcher's long, dangerous illness, and by her own enforced residence in Lisbon while nursing her son back to life ; he refused even to repay a small sum of money she had been obliged to borrow from Sir Hamilton Seymour while making her preparations to bring the invalid back to England.

But the resentment she no doubt felt and expressed against her husband on this occasion did not prevent her from receiving him with perfect friendliness in Chesterfield Street when he came there to visit his son. Indeed, throughout her long life nothing is more remarkable than the way in which even reasonable bitterness against injury melted, whenever the occasion demanded, into the kindest actions.

George Norton himself mentioned a little incident which occurred at this time when husband and wife met almost daily in their son's sick-room.

“I was remarking to him [Fletcher] that I was

about taking a new lease for my house [in Wilton Place] when she said, ‘What nonsense, when there is a room for you here.’”

But it was impossible for him to understand or appreciate her impulsive hospitality. He hurried to put it down to some base ulterior motive on her part.

Her most pressing need for money was unexpectedly relieved, though not by him.

When Lord Melbourne died, the preceding autumn, he left, beside his will, a letter to his brother Lord Beauvale, giving certain pecuniary directions in favour of Lady Brandon and Mrs. Norton, and containing a solemn declaration that what he had instructed the Attorney-General to say on his trial as to the latter's purity was true. He said that as his indiscretion had exposed her to obloquy and suspicion, he was bound to renew this declaration.

Mrs. Norton herself relates how the first payment of this legacy became due in the autumn of her return from Lisbon,—

“when I was thinking where we should have to go next : to Madeira, or the Cape of Good Hope, to see my son die as my father had died : when I was already well aware of the uselessness of appealing to my husband to bear his share of all that unusual expense.”

It was not a time, one will agree, to refuse such welcome aid out of pride, or fine-drawn scruples.

“I was simply glad,” she confesses “(let those sneer at it who please), that with such a husband and such a destiny of never-ending troubles, the family of the man in whose name I had suffered so much were willing to prove, not for my sake, but for his, that his kindness to me outlived him.”

The next year she spent abroad with her invalid son, drifting about in search of health, which for a

while at least, was to be successful. Part of this time she was with her sister, Lady Dufferin. And during this period of foreign travel began her very real friendship with the Queen of Holland, wife of William III.

We get a charming impression of this royal personage a few years later from Motley's Letters.

*"August 1856.*

"She is tall and very fair, and must have had a great deal of blonde, German beauty. Her voice is agreeable, and she speaks English, not only with great elegance and fluency, but almost without foreign accent. We talked a good deal too about Mrs. Norton, of whom she expressed the most unbounded admiration for her genius and the charm of her conversation."

At the time of her first relations with Mrs. Norton the Queen must have been a woman of about thirty-two, saddened by the loss of her second son while still quite a little child. It was perhaps some such human link which made the very human relation between this queen and this English stranger.

The long sojourn abroad was broken for Mrs. Norton by an illness of Mrs. Sheridan's in the autumn of 1850, an illness so serious as to summon the daughter home to England. Mrs. Sheridan rallied for a time, though she never really recovered, and died at last in June 1851; and during the whole winter of 1850-1 we find Mrs. Norton near her mother in her old house in Chesterfield Street.



Emery Walker Ltd.

*Mrs Sheridan*  
*from the drawing by John Hayter*



## CHAPTER XVII

### STIRLING OF KEIR—"STUART OF DUNLEATH"

MRS. NORTON'S return to England was chronicled by her old friend, Abraham Hayward, in a letter to one of his friends :

*"November 2, 1850.*

"Mrs. Norton is in town, escorted back from Brussels by Milnes and Stirling."

The first-named of these was an old acquaintance, the poet Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, whose peculiar form of wit is mischievously characterised by Mrs. Norton's nickname for him, "The Bird of Paradox."

The other was Stirling of Keir, afterwards Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, the man who was to be, many years later, her second husband—a young Scotsman, who had won a name as a writer in a comparatively unknown field of scholarship on the appearance of his first important work, "Annals of the Artists in Spain." This friendship, so much closer and more lasting than those that came before and after it, would seem to have sprung up and flourished in the very unlikeness of the two natures thus drawn to one another. He was a High Churchman and a Tory; a man of an exquisitely fastidious scholarship, which kept him recasting and polishing what he

happened to be writing, till he died with his principal work still unfinished; a man of method, a collector with a passion for small and fanciful details, with an intense pride of family and inheritance, as is shown by the quaint epitaph he once wrote on himself:

"Here lies Stirling of Keir,  
A very good man, but queer.  
If you want to find a queerer,  
You must dig up a Stirling of Keirer."

Very gentle, and kind, and unobtrusive, yet exceedingly pertinacious to obtain what he once set his mind on; warmly liked by his friends, especially his men-friends—"the prince of good fellows" the American Ticknor calls him; with many pleasant tastes and appreciations which would have made him a delightful companion. Very agreeable to look at, too, with his narrow Scottish face and high, well-bred features, but slightly made, with a scholar's stoop. And in spite of the tenacity of his personal qualities, not a strong man, with none of the warm, spontaneous impulses which made Mrs. Norton so young, which kept her young, while he grew old, so that in the end the ten years' difference of age between them seems almost to have been reversed in her favour.

Perhaps it was her very warmth and youth and generous impulsiveness which attracted him to her, quite as much as her beauty and brilliancy. And as for her! One wonders whether the woman ever existed who could remain quite cold to the affectionate admiration of a man ten years her junior, with all its sudden renewal of old flatteries, old conclusions, at a time of her life when she had begun to think that part of her history finished.

But there was much besides a new romantic friendship to make this year of return to her own country a sort of crisis in the life of Mrs. Norton. She was forty-three. The past, which might easily have fallen into a kind of unreality during her two years' wandering on

the Continent, must have come back with a sudden recoil upon her when she found herself again in familiar places, among the half-forgotten obligations of old conventions and old friends. Her relations with her husband had long been quasi-friendly, but it is unlikely that even the possibility of a renewal of intercourse with him, however formal, however slight, could have made any impression on her but pain. She was generous enough to forgive, to overlook to an incredible extent the injury he had once inflicted on her—to forgive, but never to forget, for she was not a woman who easily forgot anything. A very slight circumstance was enough to stir old half-dead memories and bring them to life again. And everything about her just then might have suggested half-dead memories. The form they sometimes took, and the extravagant use she made of them, is shown by a letter of her old friend Sir Henry Taylor, written some time this same winter.

“On Saturday I dined and went to the play with Mrs. Norton, which sounds gay, but which is as saddening a way of passing an evening as I could find. Her society is saddening to me in itself, so glorious a creature to look at even as she is—so transcendent formerly, and now so faded in beauty and foundered in life. She went to see a play called *Victorine* (which I think you have seen), in order to see what would be the effect upon her of seeing now what she had seen eighteen years ago, and never since. The effect was what she probably expected, to make her cry—not, I think, at anything in the play, but at the collocation of the past with the present.”

This play, *Victorine*, was presented in London during the first years of the reign of William IV., at the height of Mrs. Norton’s own early triumphs. But besides what Sir Henry Taylor rather ponderously calls the “collocation of the past with the present”; besides the more subtle influence of fresh emotional experience, with its necessary accompaniment of pain

for any moment of happiness, and its necessary revolt against the dead-weight of obligation which she must carry for the rest of her life, there was a very simple and obvious reason for this sudden recrudescence of the past—her own youth, which was beginning to lie so far behind her that she might be supposed almost to have forgotten it, or at least to look back upon its struggles and useless sacrifices with philosophic calm.

All this winter of 1850-1 she was preparing for the press a new novel, “*Stuart of Dunleath*,” perhaps even now the most read and best known of her writings—interesting to us, however, not so much for its own sake, charming as it is, as for the light it throws on its author. For, in spite of obvious incompatibilities, we must still feel that “*Stuart of Dunleath*” is a book made out of the very warp and woof of her own experience. Nothing is less like herself than her heroine, Eleanor Raymond, whom she describes as “without brilliancy, without contrast; nymph-like, classical, colourless—the pale red of the small melancholy mouth, the grey hazel of the shy passionate eyes, the soft brown of the luxuriant hair, all melting into one harmony of tint like a fair Italian picture”—a creature, gifted indeed and fine-spirited, but peculiarly tender, sensitive, helplessly submissive to each new shock of adverse fortune.

Yet, as one reads, one is strangely convinced that this gentle being is, if not Mrs. Norton herself, stripped of the hard human alloy which made her the cause sometimes, as well as the victim of her own misfortunes, yet at least the kind of creature that would have most deeply roused her own sympathies and admiration if she had seen her the victim she herself describes. Such substitution in the chief character would not diminish, rather increase the author’s personal emotions while writing such a book. For Eleanor’s story has many things about it strangely like her own.

It is the story of a child, tenderly brought up to love and admire a young and charming man, whom her dying father had appointed as her guardian, confronted at the same time with the loss of her fortune and of her early friend; for David Stuart is supposed to have committed suicide from remorse over the unsuccessful outcome of his unwarrantable speculations with the sums entrusted to him. Left penniless by her guardian's imprudence—to put no worse a name to it—she is persuaded by those about her to marry a man she does not love, who, after his first passion for her is exhausted, treats her with extreme brutality. Her two children, while still little boys, are drowned while out in a boat with their father.

And just at the point when her husband's open infidelity has added the last straw to her other misfortunes, the hero, Stuart of Dunleath, comes back from Canada, where he has been living through all the years of Eleanor's marriage, busy in replacing the lost fortune, in which undertaking he at last succeeded, by means more convincing than those the fiction of that day usually troubled itself to provide for its readers. He comes back to see his former ward and get her forgiveness. She has always loved him. Perfectly innocently, she loves him still, and he, for the first time, loves her.

An extraordinary exhibition of brutality on the part of Eleanor's husband, Sir Stephen Penrhyn, brings matters to a crisis. Eleanor leaves her husband, and refuses ever to go back to him. She even consents, in her first weak impulse of bitterness against him, to begin proceedings of divorce, by David Stuart's advice, and with the implied understanding that her first free step will be marriage with himself.

The interest of the book, in fact, centres in the struggle of the heroine between her duty in an unhappy marriage and her love for a man in every way fitted to receive her love. It is a question

whether any woman, herself engaged in something of the same struggle, could write such a story without drawing largely on her own inner experiences.

It is with the confessed intention of throwing light on Mrs. Norton's own inner experience at this period that all the passages quoted from this book have been selected.

“It is always easier to a woman than to a man to admit what the Portuguese proverb calls ‘the impossibility of impossible things.’ The boundaries of duty, religion, and social necessity are walls round a woman's heart and light fences round a man's. So high, so blank, so difficult to her that often she never even looks beyond, or, having looked, drops back with a sighing farewell to the world of hope without. So easy, so little of a bar to him that, let passion but spur him, and he leaps at once.”

And a little further on, in the midst of the unhappy wife's temptation to give herself up to this new love :

“She remembered how passionately enamoured of her her husband had seemed to be, and how soon that love vanished, leaving the dregs of a fitful admiration, which made her almost loathe her own beauty, as the only attraction she possessed for him. What if all men's love vanished so in the security of wedded life ? She knew she was sure of David's pity, of his tenderness ; that he would never maltreat her ; but his love—real love—the only love that was worth inspiring—the only love that could endure, the love wherein all things are pure, all things are holy, for which Heaven's blessing could be asked and Heaven's blessing granted —would that be hers ?—would he, could he, give her that under the circumstances ?”

A little further on we find a strangely fervid acknowledgment that nothing can do away with the sacred obligation of the marriage vow, in which every word seems charged with a very passion of personal renunciation.

"In Eleanor's youth she had married a man she did not love, whom she did not profess to love, for certain advantages, to avoid certain threatening miseries. She had enjoyed those advantages, she had been rescued from those miseries ; and now that they were over, had she the right to annul the unloving vow for the sake of the first, her only great temptation ? She saw herself standing before the sacrament table, listening and trembling under her long white veil, a young and most unhappy bride, vowing for all the years that should intervene between that passing instant and death. When she made that vow, she made it with simple sincerity and with deep, sorrowful awe ; when she made it she believed in truth that only death could end the union by which it pledged her to abide.

"True, her husband was false to her ; but his falsehood could not quit her of her vow. His sin was not to be balanced by her sin ; even were it because of his sin, and not because of her own wild love, that she had for ever forsaken the shelter of his house."

There are many more passages of the same kind. The whole account of this imagined struggle between duty and inclination is, in fact, remarkable for its clear-sighted analysis and rejection of every argument which might have given Mrs. Norton a right to seek her own happiness in ways which might still lie open to her. For in the end the poor young heroine gives up her life to her duty with very scant reward, for her lover almost immediately consoles himself for her loss by a marriage with a very charming lady who makes him happier than he quite deserves. Yet at the last there was this one touch of comfort for Eleanor, in the secret, invincible consciousness that, come what might, it was not David's wife but herself who had been the real love of his life. Mrs. Norton declares :

"Oh feel sure, Eleanor ! He spoke no more than truth when he told you, you were his ideal of love and loveliness. The woman who is so loved may have successors, as she has had predecessors ; but rivals she has none. Lone and different as the moon

in a heaven full of stars, she remains in the world of that man's heart. He has known other women, and he has known her. It may be the love of his youth, or the wife of his old age—first love or last love, it matters not. The love, the one love that fulfils all the exigencies of illusion, all the charms of sense, and all the pleasures of companionship, comes but once in man's lifetime. The rest are substitutes, makeshifts for love; to them in vain he shall affirm, or deny, that which they desire or dread to hear. In his heart a shadow sits throned, who for ever bends down to listen, to watch those who would approach him, and bar them out with whispers of sorrowful comparison and the delight of remembered days.”

The passage gains in value when we remember that it was written by a woman richly endowed with the qualities which make friendship difficult between men and women, and by her unfortunate position for ever denied a more tender relation than friendship—for ever condemned to see the men who had once cared for her and for whom she might have cared, turn to some other woman, less lovely, less satisfying perhaps than herself, leaving her only memories.

But it would be unfair and inconsistent with Mrs. Norton's natural buoyancy of temper to leave her too long in this melancholy shadow. We read of her, for instance, in Lady Eastlake's reminiscences of that same winter in London society.

“*January 28.*—At the Bunsens' yesterday I saw Mrs. Norton, and looked at her well. Her beauty is, perhaps, of too high an order to strike at first, especially as she is now above forty. It did not give me much artistic pleasure, but I could see that I should probably think her more and more beautiful. Also I did not see her speak or smile, as she was listening to music. Lady Lyell was in great beauty; to my mind she has far more beauty of a legitimate kind than Mrs. Norton, though she does not use her eyes so ably and wickedly.”

This probably refers to that habit which Fanny Kemble elsewhere remarks of Mrs. Norton—viz. her keeping her eyes cast down, even while she sang or talked. So, when at last she did raise her lashes, which were very beautiful and soft and dark, it gave them the more effect.

In July of this same year we have the following gay little letter from her to Lady Duff Gordon :

*"July 1851.*

"**MY DEAR LUCIE,**

"We have never thanked you for the red Pots, which no early Christian should be without, and which add that finishing stroke to the splendour of our demesne, which was supposed to depend on a roc's egg in less intelligent times. We have now a warm Pompeian appearance, and the constant contemplation of these classical objects favours the beauty of the facial line; for what can be deduced from the great fact apparent in all the statues of antiquity, that straight noses were the ancient custom, but the logical assumption that the constant habit of turning up the nose at unseemly objects, such as the 'National Gallery' and other offensive and obtrusive things, has produced the offensive modern divergence from the real true and proper line of profile? I rejoice to think that we ourselves are exempt. I attribute this to our love of Pompeian Pots (on account of the beauty and distinction of this Pot's shape I spell it with a big P), which has kept us straight in a world of crookedness. The pursuit of profiles under difficulties! How much more rare than a pursuit of knowledge! Talk of setting good examples to our children. Bah! Let us set Pompeian Pots before our children, and when they grow up they will not depart from them.

"Stirling is gone to Scotland to look at his unfinished house. I very much doubt its being fit to live in for two months; none of the grates are fixed. But he will report when he returns, in a week's time.

"I called for you the wet day you departed, to carry you to our den, and Lord Lansdowne came after his dinner, making sure of finding you; but you were gone.

"My family are all scattering abroad, but wait—some of them—for the wedding of Mabel Graham on August 7.<sup>1</sup> It is a most satisfactory marriage in all respects.

"Brin continues very seedy; Fletcher pretty brisk. When shall you again be seen in London? Food is there at five o'clock every day on our table, but slumber is only to be had on the house steps.

"Your affectionate  
"CARRY."

The unfinished state of Mr. Stirling's house at Keir was owing to the extensive alterations which he had lately entered upon to change the place he had inherited from his father in 1847 into the beautiful, stately form it still retains, with its portico and wings and terraced approaches. He had already begun to make plans to fill it, as we see from one of Lady Duff Gordon's letters :

"July 20, 1851.

"We have a kind of half-project of going to Scotland this year and visiting Stirling at Keir, together with Mrs. Norton and her son, with whom I am nearly as much friends as with his mother. He has grown into a delightful young man, and certainly twenty-one is a charming age when it is not odious."

The autumn was spent in a series of visits in the north of England and in Scotland, where, for the first time, Mrs. Norton saw Keir. It also marks the beginning of her last wretched struggle with her husband.

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Sir James Graham, *w.* to Lord Feversham.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LIFE ABROAD—LAST QUARREL WITH HER HUSBAND

ON June 9, 1851, Mrs. Sheridan died, at the house of her eldest daughter, Lady Dufferin, having long been in delicate health and, for the latter part of her life, nearly blind. She had grieved also greatly over the loss of her sons, and over her daughter's misfortunes, which had driven her gradually more and more out of the world, till at last she lived in almost complete retirement, though never inactive. Her patient, energetic life came to an end in perfect consistency with its beginning, and she left behind her a very beautiful example of earnestness, usefulness, and unobtrusive self-sacrifice.

At her death George Norton inherited the life-interest in his wife's portion from her father, which had not been secured to her in any way, and Mrs. Norton inherited, secured to her most carefully by every expression of her mother's will, an income for life of £480. One cannot but be amused by the tone Mr. Norton assumed in speaking of this inheritance, as though he had not been quite fairly treated by it.

"In 1851," he says, "my son's expenses at Oxford increasing, and my own expenses in Yorkshire being greater to keep up the rents in the then depressed state of agriculture, I learned that Mrs. Norton had been left £500 per annum by her mother, from whom I

was not aware that she had any expectations. I then proposed a reduction of her allowance, which she would not accede to."

She refused, perhaps, with the more emphasis because she did not believe her son's expenses at Oxford had anything to do with her husband's proposal to divide her inheritance with him. Her second son, Brinsley, after his return from Portugal, had been sent by his father to a private tutor to be prepared for Oxford, where he was entered at University College, the year of his mother's return to England.

"Kindly, clever, handsome, but wild," is the judgment of one of his kinsmen. He was so recklessly extravagant at college that he had to be withdrawn at the end of his first year, deeply in debt. His health, too, seems to have suffered. His mother was anxious to take him away with her to Italy, where she was going to join her eldest son, who had been lately made secretary of a secretary of the British Embassy at Naples. She was full of anxiety for his future, painfully aware that a woman is not the best judge of what is best to be done for a youth who had already shown himself headstrong and extravagant.

Her husband was quite ready to let him go wherever his mother chose to take him, always on condition she found the means for supporting him there. Naples was not exactly the place one would have selected for a lad who had shown a weakness for pleasure; nor was idleness the best opportunity for overcoming dangerous propensities. But whatever mistakes Mrs. Norton made in this respect were exacted from her in the future to the extreme of her powers to pay.

All the last year of her stay at Naples she was hard at work on another novel to pay Brinsley's Oxford debts; she was trying to find money to pay the preliminary training of some profession for him.

These expensive responsibilities, however, had no effect on George Norton, who was determined to make the legacy an excuse for curtailing his allowance to his wife.

She reminded him of the signed contract between them; he replied that he was not legally bound by that contract any longer than he pleased to acknowledge it. She could not believe this; she thought he was only trying to frighten her into abating her claim. But when she came to draw on her quarter's allowance for March 1852, six months before the first instalment of her mother's legacy could be paid, her cheques were returned dishonoured. When she remonstrated—when she represented to him that she had not the means to pay these creditors without the money she had a right to expect from him; that she had already spent all she could borrow to prevent the public actions these creditors were already instituting to recover their claims by law, he replied through his solicitor that he declined all discussion of the subject.

She had hurried back to England in the early summer of 1853 to try to bring order out of this confusion, only to find a disquieting difference of legal opinion as to the validity of the contract by which she believed her husband bound. In honour, yes; they all agreed he was bound in honour to respect his witnessed signature. But in law, no. In law, a man could not contract with his own wife.

She was advised, however, to let one of these suits come up for trial, as a sort of test case, to get a legal verdict on the subject. This case came finally to a hearing in the Westminster County Court on August 18, 1853. The plaintiffs were the Thrupps, the carriage builders; the bill was for repairs of a little carriage, in use for twelve years, the same which she had set up with such pride, and paid for out of the proceeds of her very successful poem, "The Dream."

The defendant was, of course, George Norton, as

a married woman could not be sued for debt. On ordinary occasions, indeed, Mrs. Norton would not have appeared at all, but in this case she was subpoenaed as a witness.

The dingy little court-room was crowded to excess with a very different audience from that usually attracted by such occasions. Indeed, there was hardly space about the bench for the throng of witnesses, subpoenaed by George Norton, in the zeal of his own defence. Among them were to be seen a former maid of his wife's, by whom he hoped to prove her extravagance; her publishers and bankers, by whom he hoped to prove that she had ample means to pay her debts without help from him; and herself, whom he hoped to betray into still more damaging admissions.

The only excuse one may find for his conduct on this occasion was that he had been both amazed and enraged in his study of his wife's bank-book, delivered up to him on demand by his wife's bankers, to find that she had more money than he had supposed. It was not in his nature to ask himself what right he had to her whole confidence, either in this or in any other matter. He could only feel that he had been deceived, managed. There is no doubt that she had often managed him in the past, as much for his own advantage as for hers. But whenever he suspected it he resented it. After his separation from her, his family, or those unkindly disposed to her, had only to touch that sore spot to send him off into the most brutal conclusions against her.

So now, on finding she was a richer woman than he had believed, the old suspicion of her rushed back, and the old revengeful instinct sprang again into life, to strike her down, to make her suffer for it. She herself describes their encounter in the court-room.

"When I first saw my husband my courage sank; the horrible strangeness of my position oppressed me

with anger and shame ; my heart beat ; the crowd of people swam before my eyes ; and the answers I had begun to make, and declarations I had intended to struggle through, choked in my throat, which felt as if it were full of dust. Mr. Norton rose, gathered up his papers, and saying with a sneer, ‘ What does the witness say ? Let her speak up ; I cannot hear her ! ’ he came and seated himself close to me—there was only the skirting-board that divided the court between us. I saw the glare of the angry eyes I remembered long ago in my home, the sneer of triumph and determination to crush me at all hazards. I felt, as I looked for an instant towards him, that he saw in me neither a woman to be spared public insult nor a mother to be spared shameful sorrow, but simply a claimant to be non-suited, a creditor to be evaded, a pecuniary encumbrance he was determined to be rid of. More than one of the professional gentlemen present appealed to the Judge whether he should be permitted to sit where he had placed himself ; but there he continued to sit, instructing his counsel in an undertone what questions to put to me, making notes of the case, and occasionally peremptorily addressing me himself.”

But even she was not prepared for the extreme brutality of this last attack upon her. When the validity of the contract was at last brought up to be discussed, Mr. Norton acknowledged that, though at the time of signing it he had known it was not valid, and supposed that she did too, he would still have continued to be bound by it, if he had not been deceived by her ; for before ever entering into this arrangement, he had enacted, as a chief condition of it, his wife’s solemn asseveration that she had never received money from Lord Melbourne—this to be considered by her husband as her final declaration of her innocence in her relations with the Prime Minister. Her husband asserted that she made this declaration, that she afterwards solemnly reaffirmed it to her eldest son, whom her husband had chosen as his messenger for that purpose. But from her bank-book he found

she had been in receipt of an income from Lord Melbourne's brother or sister ever since 1848.

No one, not even his wife, saw at once all the absurd flaws in this statement. The inconsistency of it in the fact, for instance, that he had stopped her allowance months before he saw her bank-book or knew of the annuity paid by Lady Palmerston; or in the fact that Lord Melbourne was still alive, and there could have been no question of what he had left her when the contract was drawn up and signed between herself and her husband.

But every one in the room could feel the full force of the insult, the remarkable reassertion of the old slander, which had been disproved years ago by the verdict for Lord Melbourne, its assumption as a living fact, a moving force in her husband's present action against her. To go on in her own bitter words, her own apology for the scene which followed in the court-room :

"From the moment the questioning began about Lord Melbourne I lost all self-possession. Not because I was ashamed of having accepted his bequest; if I had thought there was shame in it I should not have taken it; but because I then saw all the cruel baseness of Mr. Norton's intention. All flashed upon me at once. I felt that I no longer stood in that court to struggle for an income, but to struggle against infamy. I knew by sudden instinct that the husband who had so often, to me and to others, asserted that the trial was the work of advisers, was now about to pretend he believed the charge brought against Lord Melbourne in 1836. The wild exasperation came over me, which seemed so inexplicable to those who did not know our real story. He who had falsely accused me long ago, he who had taken my young children, and let one of them die without even sending for me till too late, he who had embittered and clouded my whole existence, who was now in my presence only to cheat me—was once more going to brand me before the world.

"I felt giddy; the faces of the people grew in-

distinct ; my sentences became a confused alternation of angry loudness and husky attempts to speak. I saw nothing but the husband whose mercenary nature Lord Melbourne himself had warned me I judged too leniently ; nothing but the gnome, proceeding again to dig away, for the sake of money, what remnant of peace, happiness, and reputation might have rested in the future years of my life ; turning up, as he dug, dead sorrows, and buried shames, and miserable recollections, and careless who was hurt by them, so long as he evaded payment of a disputed annuity, and stamped his own signature, worthless.

"I tried at first confusedly enough, as the broken sentences in the report showed, but afterwards as connectedly as I could, to explain that Lord Melbourne had left me nothing in his will ; that I believed he could not, his property being strictly entailed ; that I had never been his mistress ; that I was young enough, and more than young enough, to be his daughter, and that he had never treated me otherwise than as a friend ; that dying he had left nothing but a letter solemnly repeating his assurance of my innocence, recommending me to the generosity of his brother, and stating the amount of provision he wished made for me ; that his brother and his sister had abided by, and fulfilled his intentions, because his memory was dear to them ; and none but my husband had ever accused him of baseness."

To turn from her own account to the details of the case which appeared the next morning in all the newspapers, at this point in her evidence there was a "burst of applause from some two hundred or three hundred people in the body of the court, which was at once properly suppressed by the order of the Judge."

She goes on herself :

"The feeling in the court began to show itself in a strong and obvious sympathy for me ; and the case became more like a vehement debate than a judicial inquiry.

"Mr. Leman was examined to prove that there had been no condition whatever (as Mr. Norton had just affirmed) concerning Lord Melbourne, either written or verbal."

The case, however, was decided against the creditor and in favour of George Norton, on the technical point that this particular bill had been contracted before the allowance had been withdrawn.

Mrs. Norton announced her submission to the verdict with a kind of fierce resignation.

"I do not ask for my rights. I have no rights; I have only wrongs. I have no doubt I have a very ample income, upon an average for some years, £1,500; and now that I know my husband can defraud me, I will not live abroad with my son."

The whole court again burst into applause. She goes on with her own account of it:

"Mr. Norton then vehemently addressed *me*, the Judge, the reporters for the press. He said I had told the grossest falsehoods; that he only regretted he had no opportunity at present; that he hoped at some future opportunity to 'give the contradiction that from his heart and soul he could give.' He moved still nearer to me, clenched his hand, and spoke in a threatening manner; but the groaning and utter confusion in court made it difficult even for me to gather exactly what his threats were, except that they had reference to the hope of some fresh occasion of debate. The Judge ordered the court to be cleared, and the next case called on; and so ended this disgraceful scene."

The next morning all the papers were filled with a detailed account of the proceedings. How exasperating to the principal victim, who saw herself vulgarised, exaggerated, her statements hopelessly garbled and confused in the clumsy report of the evidence—any one who has ever been in anything like the same

position will best understand. And one of the most intolerable complications of her position—intolerable especially to a woman of her peculiar temperament—was that, while she had been subjected to a long, insulting cross-examination, made to tell the court the number of her servants, the money she was in the habit of giving away in charity, the most personal and private details of her daily life, had been forced to read the most humiliating misstatements about Lord Melbourne in the reports of the trial, she could not herself make the slightest effort to get her own statement before the world without being told that she was courting publicity.

Much against the wishes of her family, she did write and send a letter to *The Times* the day after the trial, merely to state the flaws which made her husband's charge against her not only insulting but ridiculous.

It would have been better for her if she had hurled back her retort with less hard exasperation of spirit. A few days later appeared George Norton's reply, also in the form of a public letter to *The Times*—a letter of extraordinary length, and in many respects an extraordinary document. In the first place, it was a very careful reassertion of his belief in his wife's guilt, going back for its charges far into the past, before their marriage, when he represents himself as a blindly infatuated lover, over whom she had all power to deceive him as she would, mentioning a point of time before the birth of their two youngest children as the moment when he began to suspect her of improper intimacy with Lord Melbourne, adding one or two insulting little stories in confirmation of the justice of these suspicions, pursuing his rehearsal of his grievances till they seem to include and accuse every one in any way connected with him from earliest times down to the moment of this last clash of difference between himself and his wife, when he accuses her of making use of the legal non-existence of a

married woman "to oppress him with litigation and costs and impair his already crippled means, which should have been applied to the maintenance of himself and his two sons, both of them just entering on life."

There is a peculiar quality running through the whole letter, as of a man blind and deaf to all the more generous impulses of the spirit—a kind of incapacity for knowing his own baseness, which made him repeatedly assert as points in his favour things that must only prove him more strangely dead to pity or magnanimity. He taunts his wife with her readiness in the past to come back to him. He speaks of her painful agitation during that most painful scene in the County Court "as the most splendid piece of acting ever exhibited, however much the sober mind of England must revolt against the disgrace of a court of justice being turned into the stage of Drury Lane"—wishing evidently to lose no opportunity of giving a stab at her, wherever he knew it would hurt her most.

This letter was instantly answered by several people more or less directly affected by some of its misstatements. Mr. Leman, George Norton's own lawyer, wrote to *The Times* flatly contradicting all his employer had said about the private contract which the solicitor had drawn up and which Mr. Norton had broken.

Sir John Bayley wrote at length to deny all Mr. Norton's assertions against his wife's conduct during the negotiations in which Sir John himself had taken part. A portion of this letter I have already quoted.

Sir William Follett was dead, and could not contradict Mr. Norton's statement that the suit against Lord Melbourne had been carried on with his advice. But Mrs. Norton herself had a letter reprinted which had appeared in *The Times* as long ago as the summer of 1836, written by the solicitors who had prepared the evidence for the prosecution, declaring that Sir William had neither advised nor approved nor even

known on what evidence the case was to rest till a few days before the trial.

It would have been far better if she had been content with such indirect methods of self-defence. But perhaps that would have been asking more of her than was in her power to do. Abraham Hayward, reproached by some mutual friend for not using his influence to prevent her from committing herself further, remarks ruefully:

"I was obliged to accompany Mrs. Norton to the County Court, which I did simply to prevent her from going alone. No one can be Mrs. Norton's adviser, for she never follows advice. I ended by telling her, in Lady Seymour's presence, that she ought to be interdicted the use of pen, ink, and paper."

She had reached the age, however, when no one can interdict a woman from what she has finally made up her mind to do, and her reply to her husband's letter came in a letter to *The Times* a few days later, quite as long, quite as angry, as his, but differing from his as much as might be expected from those very dissimilar natures, which an equally violent emotion has thus stripped bare and unshamed to our view. It is not his anger, but the meanness revealed by that anger, which disgusts us in George Norton's letter. It is only her anger, the loss of dignity and charity which it entails, which we regret in Mrs. Norton's reply. The purpose that drove her on to refute her husband's accusations against her, one after another, was not unworthy, is not to be entirely condemned, though it would have been better served by a more temperate and less personal statement. She explains it herself as follows in the concluding sentences of her letter:

"I have done. There will always be those to whom a slander is precious, and who cannot bear to have it refuted. There are also those in whose eyes the

accusation of a woman is her condemnation, and who care little whether the story be false or true, so long as there is, or was, a story against her. But juster minds, who will pause and review the circumstances Mr. Norton himself has published will perhaps think the fate of that woman a hard one, whom neither the verdict of a jury, nor the solemn denial of a voice from the dead, nor the petition of her husband for a reconciliation and oblivion of the past, can clear from a charge always and utterly untrue. On Mr. Norton's own letter I am content that people should judge us both. Many friends have wished me to pass over that letter in disdainful silence, as refuting itself; and perhaps, if I were happy enough to be obscure and unknown, that would be my course. But I have a position separate from my woman's destiny: I am known as a writer, and I will not permit that Mr. Norton's letter shall remain on the journals of Great Britain as the uncontradicted record of my actions.

"I will, as far as I am able, defend a name which might have been only favourably known, but which my husband has rendered notorious. The little world of my chance readers may say of me, after I am dead and gone and my struggles over and forgotten, 'The woman who wrote this book had an unhappy history,' but they shall not say, 'The woman who wrote this book was a profligate and a mercenary hypocrite.' Since my one gift of writing gives me friends among strangers, I appeal to the opinion of strangers as well as that of friends. Since, in however bounded and narrow a degree, there is a chance that I may be remembered after death, I will not have my whole life misrepresented.

"Let those women who have the true woman's lot of being unknown out of the circle of their homes thank God for that blessing—it is a blessing; but for me publicity is no longer a matter of choice. Defence is possible to me, not silence. And I must remind those who think the right of a husband so indefeasible that a wife ought rather to submit to the martyrdom of her reputation than be justified at his expense, that I have refrained. All I state now I might have stated at any time during the past unhappy years; and I never did publicly state it till now—now, when I find

Mr. Norton slandering the mother of his children, endeavouring thus to overwhelm me with infamy, for no offence but that of having rashly asserted a claim upon him which was found not to be valid in law, but only binding on him as a man of honour."

## CHAPTER XIX

### PAMPHLET ON " ENGLISH LAWS FOR WOMEN " AND " LETTER TO THE QUEEN "

WE are taught that human nature is made strong by suffering, but our experience shows us that often the reverse of this is true—that the spirit, as well as the body, is weakened by its scars. One can hardly see how the memories of Mrs. Norton's past experiences with her husband could have encouraged her to patience or mercy or self-restraint in this last encounter with him.

In her examination at the trial in the Westminster County Court she had accused him of taking her copyright. He had, in fact, assumed possession of all her contracts with her publishers, to help him calculate the amount of her income; and there was no power in English law to force him to relinquish them unless he chose. We have his own vehement denial that he ever intended to keep them. But his wife's past experience of his word was not such as to give her any very great confidence in his last promise to her, if it should be to his advantage to break it.

All her old indignation was roused, not against him individually—for (in her own words), "Gone, past, buried in unutterable scorn are the days in which I appealed either to him or from him—but against the existent law and that nation of gallant gentlemen who

scarcely care and scarcely know what is the existing law on such subjects."

She did not return to Italy that autumn. We hear of her in November staying at Clumber, the country place of the Duke of Newcastle, one of that notable group of High Church Peelites of whom the other two were Sidney Herbert and Gladstone. And early the next year she was back in London, very busy, not on her interrupted novel, but at her old work of pamphlet writing—on the old subject too, the insufferable inequalities of the English law for women; reformed indeed ever so slightly by her own Infant Custody Bill, but still extraordinarily unjust towards the very class most in need of the law's protection.

The Crimean war broke out in March 1854, not the most auspicious moment, we should think, for instituting a reform of the laws about women; but it did not prevent her from writing her pamphlet on this particular subject, "English Laws for Women of the Nineteenth Century," and printing it at her own expense for private distribution some time early in May of the same year. It is almost forgotten now, or remembered only as an undignified publication of private and personal grievances, made still more objectionable by the harsh and violent tone it retains through all its hundred and forty-four pages towards its principal victim. It has, however, plenty of excuse for its existence. And the impression it made on the men and women of that generation is incalculable, coming as it did at a time when public opinion had so far outstripped the law in its judgment of the rights and wrongs of women that it was ready to be set on fire by the story of a woman who, to use her own words, "had learned the English law piecemeal by suffering under it." She goes on :

" My husband is a lawyer; and he has taught it [the law] to me by exercising over my tormented and restless life every quirk and quibble of its tyranny;

acknowledged tyranny; acknowledged, again I say, not by wailing, angry, despairing women, but by Chancellors, ex-Chancellors, legal reformers, and members of both Houses of Parliament.”

But (to quote from the beginning of her own work) :

“‘It won’t do to have Truth and Justice on our side : we must have Law and Lawyers.’

CHARLES DICKENS.

“I take those words as my text. In consequence of the imperfect state of the law I have suffered bitterly, and for a number of years : I have lately been insulted, defrauded, and libelled ; and as the law is constituted I find redress impossible.

“To publish comments on my case for the sake of obtaining sympathy ; to prove merely that my husband has been unjust, and my fate a hard one, would be a very poor and barren ambition. I aspire to a different object. I desire to prove, not my own suffering or his injustice, but that the present law of England cannot prevent any such suffering or control such injustice. I write in the hope that the law may be amended ; and that those who are at present so ill-provided as to have only ‘Truth and Justice’ on their side, may hereafter have the benefit of ‘Law and Lawyers.’

“I know all that can be said on my interference with such a subject—all the prejudices and contempt with which men will receive arguments from a woman, and a woman personally interested. But it is of more importance that the law should be altered than that I should be approved. Many a woman may live to thank Heaven that I had courage and energy left to attempt the task ; and since no one can foretell the future, even men may pause ere they fling down my pamphlet with masculine scorn ; for the day may come, however improbable, to some one of my readers, when he would give his right hand for the sake of sister, daughter, or friend, that the law were in such a condition as to afford a chance of justice, without the pain of a protracted struggle, or the disgrace of a public brawl.”

The tract is largely taken up with her own story, told, however, with no effort to please or conciliate, no appeal for personal sympathy, only as a sort of harsh illustration of the various defects of the law as it stood at that day. Every statement she makes she enforces with the same kind of evidence which would make it hold good in a bill for divorce or an affidavit to support a petition, with the requirements of both which forms of document she was, poor woman, only too familiar. Her accounts of her husband's cruelty to her are made in the same ruthless fashion—stripped of everything except what could be proved by witnesses or statements other than her own, always including the provocation she herself might have given him as legally part of the story. The result is often unpleasing.

She is, in fact, so eager to entrench herself in an impregnable position that she too often offends as a woman, even while she convinces by her cause. But it was the cause, not the woman, she was championing at that particular moment. It was necessary that she should be justified in each particular statement or accusation with which her pages bristle, or her tract against the English laws became so much waste-paper.

She was often violent, always vehement, descended sometimes, one feels, unnecessarily into the painful details of her own miserable struggle, yet never with all her digressions losing sight of the real purpose which drove her onward; concluding at last in a rush of passionate, thrilling words which show her at her best.

"How often in the course of this session will the same men who read this appeal with a strong adverse prejudice be roused by some thought in a favourite author, touched by some beautiful pageant of human feeling, seen among glittering lights from a side box; chanted, perhaps, in a foreign tongue. And yet I have an advantage over these, for my history is real.

I know there is no poetry in it to attract you. In the last act of this weary life of defamation I went down in a hack-cab, to take part in an ignoble struggle, in a dingy little court of justice, where I was insulted by a vulgar lawyer, with questions framed to imply every species of degradation. There was none of the pomp and circumstance of those woes that affect you, when some faultless and impossible heroine makes you dream of righting all the wrongs in the world. But faulty as I may be, and prosaic and unsympathised with as my position might then be, it was unjust; and unjust because your laws prevent justice. Let that thought haunt you, through the music of your *Sonnambulas* and *Desdemonas*, and be with you in your readings of histories and romance, and your criticism on the jurisprudence of countries less free than our own. I really wept and suffered in my early youth for wrong done, not by me, but to me, and the ghost of whose scandal is raised against me this day. I really suffered the extremity of earthly shame without deserving it (whatever chastisement my other faults may have deserved from Heaven). I really lost my young children, craved for them, struggled for them, was barred from them, and came too late to see one who had died a painful and convulsive death, except in his coffin. I really have gone through much that, if it were invented, would move you, but being of your everyday world, you are willing it should sweep past like a heap of dead leaves on the stream of time, and take its place with other things that have gone drifting down

“Où va la feuille de rose  
Et la feuille du laurier.

“Will none of you aid the cause I advocate, and forget that it was advocated by me? Think what it must be to spend all one's youth, as I have spent mine, in a series of vain struggles to obtain any legal justice. Or do not think at all about me; forget by whose story this appeal was illustrated. I can bring you others, from your own English law-books; and let my part in this be only as a voice borne by the wind, as a cry coming over the waves from a shipwreck, to where you stand safe on the shore, and which you turn and

listen to, not for the sake of those who call—you do not know them—but because it is a cry for help."

About a month after this pamphlet was printed, Lord Cranworth, the Chancellor of Lord Aberdeen's Ministry, brought forward in the Lords a Bill to reform the English Marriage and Divorce Laws.

His action in so doing, however, can hardly be attributed to anything Mrs. Norton had written or suffered in the matter. It was, in fact, a measure long promised, long delayed, drawn from the findings of a Royal Commission appointed in 1850 to look over the whole subject. In its first form, indeed, the Bill was only a plan to remove the jurisdiction of all matters matrimonial from the Ecclesiastical Courts, or Doctors' Commons, to call it by its familiar name, to a special court of their own, composed of the Chancellor and various other high dignitaries of the law, which should have all power to grant or refuse divorces, whether absolute or those amounting merely to a judicial separation, and to consider all questions involving the legal separation of husbands and wives.

It was, however, at this stage of its history so little a woman's measure that whereas in the past a woman could, though she rarely did, obtain a divorce with power to remarry, just as a man could, by special Act of Parliament, if the Lords decided that she deserved it, the new court was not allowed any discretion in the matter, the law being hard-and-fast that women could not obtain this right except in one or two monstrous and exceptional cases of injury. Any idea of equal legislation in the matter was as unacceptable in England then as now. Indeed, set forth by the new Bill, a woman's opportunity of getting a divorce, or even a legal separation from her husband was even more restricted than it had been before, nor did the proposed measure even touch upon the confused injustice of a wife's

position when alienated, but not divorced from her husband.

Any discussion on the subject, however, afforded Mrs. Norton an opportunity, which she was not slow to take advantage of. She watched the Bill's progress through the Lords, listened to the debates when it came up for a second reading, as her keen use of the various absurdities and ineptitudes which were let fall on that occasion most sharply and adequately proves.

To quote her own words after the Bill had disappeared in Committee, not to be heard of again that session :

"It drops and is given up; the Chancellor, like the Runic sorceress, exclaims :

"Leave me, leave me, to repose ;

and all go away home, like a party of miners who have given up the attempt to dig out persons buried in the superincumbent earth. They would be very glad to do something towards amending the laws for women, but really 'the subject is so surrounded with difficulty.'

In the meantime, she herself continued to suffer from the inadequacy of these very laws. To resume her story in her own words :

"After the creditors' case was over, Mr. Norton inquired whether I would 'submit to referees' the point whether he ought, in honour, to abide by his signature, and whether I would name a referee on my part. I answered in the affirmative, and I named as my referee one who may fairly claim to inspire as much confidence, respect, and universal esteem from men of all ranks, ages, or parties as I think it ever was the lot of any person to enjoy : I named the Marquis of Lansdowne. Mr. Norton proposed his own brother, Lord Grantley, which nomination was declined as an impossible choice—impossible, recollecting the circumstances of the trial, the residence of the witnesses, and

the nearness of connection. No other choice was proposed. Mr. Norton either felt that no unprejudiced gentleman in England would support him in his legal quibble, or he had never intended to propose a choice which could be accepted, which is more than probable. From the date of my mother's death he has withheld entirely, and with perfect impunity, my income as his wife. I do not receive, and have not received for the last three years a single farthing from him. He retains, and always has retained, property that was left in my home—gifts made to me by my own family on my marriage, and to my mother by H.R.H. the Duchess of York; articles bought from my literary earnings, books which belonged to Lord Melbourne, and, in particular, a manuscript of which Lord Melbourne himself was the author (when a very young man), which Mr. Norton absolutely refused to give up. He has a right to everything I have in the world, and I have no more claim upon him than any one of the Queen's ladies-in waiting, who are utter strangers to him. I never see him. I hear of him only by attacks on my reputation, and I do not receive a farthing of support from him. His reply by attorney (dated April 10, 1854) to any such demand, is to bid the creditor 'examine the will of my mother in Doctors' Commons,' thereby throwing off the mask of pretence he wore, and standing openly on his legal irresponsibility."

Meanwhile she herself was in debt to her creditors, in debt to her bankers, from whom she had borrowed a large sum to meet the obligations she had already incurred before she knew that she was to be deprived of part of her income. She was in debt to her printers for the work on which she was still engaged, hindered and handicapped in every way for lack of means. For she was always imprudent in her money arrangements, lavish in her generosity to those she loved—her two sons, the youngest entirely dependent on her; the eldest, whom she proudly describes about that time as "already launched in life, employed in Her Majesty's service among junior diplomats: the

wisest, kindest, and best son who ever struggled to do difficult duty between the parents of a divided home."

All literary work, moreover, of the kind on which her income depended was utterly at a standstill, for a reason, indeed, which we need not go far to find.

The Crimean war brought an untimely pause to Lord Cranworth's Divorce Bill. All through the long session of 1855, while the war was being fought, the Bill was sleeping peacefully in one of the pigeon-holes of Chancery. But Mrs. Norton had not been pleased to see it there, and, in spite of the distractions and anxieties in which she was herself involved, she yet found time to bring out her next pamphlet, "*A Letter to the Queen on Lord Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill.*" Not for private circulation this, but copyrighted and published and sold by Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, in December 1855.

Any return, however, which she may have received from such a sale would hardly compensate for the money she was obliged to forgo, the publishers' offers she was obliged to refuse, no longer having the time to fulfil them while engaged in this absorbing kind of writing, at a moment, too, when her value in the literary market as a writer of fiction had reached its height through the success of her latest novel. But such considerations never weighed very heavily with her in the kind of struggle she was now engaged in. In her own words :

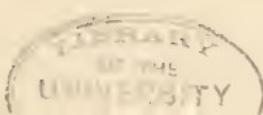
"My husband has taught me, by subpoenaing my publishers to account for my earnings, that my gift of writing was not meant for the purposes to which I have hitherto applied it. It was not intended that I should 'strive for peace and ensue it' through a life of much occasional bitterness and many unjust trials, nor that I should prove my literary ability by publishing melodies and songs for young girls and women to sing in happier homes than mine, or poetry and

prose for them to read in leisure hours, or even please myself by better and more serious attempts to advocate the rights of the people or the education and interests of the poor.

"He has made me dream that it was meant for a higher and stronger purpose, that gift which came not from man, but from God! It was meant to enable me to rouse the hearts of others to examine into all the gross injustice of these laws, to ask the nation of gallant gentlemen whose countrywoman I am, for once to hear a woman's pleading on the subject. Not because I deserve more at their hands than other women. Well I know, on the contrary, how many hundreds, infinitely better than I—more pious, more patient, and less rash under injury—have watered their bread with tears! My plea to attention is, that in pleading for myself I am able to plead for all these others. Not that my sufferings or my deserts are greater than theirs, but that I combine, with the fact of having suffered wrong, the power to comment on and explain the cause of that wrong, which few women are able to do.

"For this I believe God gave me the power of writing. To this I devote that power. I abjure all other writing till I see these laws altered. I care not what ridicule or abuse may be the result of that declaration. They who cannot bear ridicule and abuse are unfit and unable to advance any cause; and once more I deny that this is my personal cause—it is the cause of all the women of England. If I could be justified and happy to-morrow, I would still strive and labour in it; and if I were to die to-morrow, it would still be a satisfaction to me that I had so striven. Meanwhile my husband has a legal lien on the copyright of my works. Let him claim the copyright of this!"

This was her "Letter to the Queen"—a very clever arraignment of the Chancellor's Bill, both for what it proposed and for what it left undone. It struck so hard, in fact, at some of that gentleman's ponderous utterances in the debate of 1854 as to call forth a rueful protest from him when he next opened his mouth on



the subject. Lord Cranworth had remarked in defence of that part of his Bill which denied divorce to a woman for mere infidelity of the husband, that if a woman could divorce on such small ground, a man who for some reason wished his wife to divorce him had only to be a little profligate to get his freedom at his wife's expense. This expression, “a little profligate,” was made such unsparing use of that the unfortunate victim was finally moved to deny he ever said it, Hansard's record of his speech to the contrary.

In this later pamphlet Mrs. Norton went over all the ground already covered by her “English Laws,” drawing freely, as usual, from her own experience, but with much more restraint and reserve of personal detail, as befitted a work for the general public, which the first, by the way, was not. It is interesting to find a letter of Lord Brougham's about it.

“December 1855.

“It is as clever a thing as ever was written, and it has produced great good. I feel certain that the Law of Divorce will be much amended, and she has greatly contributed to it.”

Not only the Law of Divorce, but Lord Cranworth's Bill to amend the Law of Divorce was much amended in the next Parliamentary session. The question of divorce and remarriage is still open; the forces that oppose or approve it are still so actively engaged that the discussions on the Bill during this session are still unusually interesting; and no speech on the subject is more interesting than Lord Lyndhurst's.

Lord Lyndhurst was by this time a very old man, so infirm that he had to be brought to the Lords when he attended in a wheeled chair. A quaint little picture of himself and his old friend and rival, Brougham, about this time is found in Morley's “Life of Gladstone.”

"A most interesting conversation with these two wonderful old men at eighty and eighty-six respectively (it was two years later than the time of the Divorce Bill), both in the fullest possession of their faculties—Brougham vehement, impulsive, full of gesticulation, and not a little rambling; the other calm and clear as a deep pool upon rock. Brougham at last used these words: 'I tell you what, Lyndhurst, I wish I could make an exchange with you. I would give you some of my walking power, and you should give me some of your brains.' Mr. Gladstone adds his opinion that the compliment was the highest he ever knew to be paid by one human being to another."

Lord Lyndhurst's old friendship with Mrs. Norton never shows itself to better effect than on this occasion when, in several long speeches of more than his usual graceful, limpid eloquence, he makes open use of her pamphlet, quoting, or it must be reading, passages from it, so identical are the extracts from his speech in Hansard with the original; and finally offering a series of amendments covering many of the points where Mrs. Norton had found the Bill especially deficient.

Many of these amendments, especially those affecting a married woman's legal status apart from her husband, were accepted by the first-mover of the Bill rather under protest as beyond the scope of the original measure, as was perhaps the truth. But the trend of public opinion was just then too strong to be resisted. During the session of 1856, for instance, the Lower House was bombarded by more than seventy petitions for the improvement of the law as it affected women; one of these signed, it is said, by more than three thousand names, "among whom were ladies who had made the present epoch remarkable in the annals of literature," to quote the words of the M.P. who had been deputed by these same ladies to introduce their petition to the House.

The Bill passed—not that year indeed, but the next—

in spite of the steady opposition of all the bishops, especially the Bishop of Oxford, and the Roman Catholic element in the Lords, and Mr. Gladstone's High-Church stand against it in the Commons. It went into effect, January 1, 1858, and is still the law of England in matters matrimonial. With its really great reforms, the doing away with divorce by special Act of Parliament, and with the cumbrous and expensive machinery of “Doctors' Commons,” it would be absurd and untrue to say that Mrs. Norton had anything to do. This was indeed a measure so sharply demanded by the time that even a great war could not delay it.

But the Bill contained a whole cluster of lesser reforms which, as Lord Cranworth complained, were really outside the scope and plan of the original measure, but which make the Marriage Act of 1857 a sort of Bill of Rights for married women.

By Clause 21, for instance, a wife deserted by her husband may be protected in the possession of her earnings from any claim of her husband upon them.

By Clause 24 the new Court may direct payment of separate maintainence to a wife or to her trustee.

By Clause 25 a wife may inherit and bequeath property like a single woman.

By Clause 26 the wife separated from her husband is given the power of contract and suing, and being sued in any civil proceeding.

With all these reforms it is quite fair to believe that Mrs. Norton had a great deal to do, to believe even that without her eager crusade of tongue and pen to advance them, the Bill would have gone through without them, and the many women who have since benefited by them would have gone on, it may be for many years—for these reforms are slow in coming—suffering injustice without them.

It is strange to think how soon these services have been forgotten, how entirely Mrs. Norton's name until very lately has been left out of the list of women to

whom other women should be grateful. And yet one would think that in that list, by almost any measure of practical achievement her name ought to stand high, especially if we add the Infant Custody Bill to the account we have just enumerated.

## CHAPTER XX

### BRINSLEY'S MARRIAGE—A LONDON SEASON

GEORGE NORTON had restored his wife's allowance some time before Lord Cranworth's Divorce Bill had created a Court which might on her appeal have obliged him to do so; but he still continued his dispute about the amount, how much, or rather how little he might fairly pay her; and we can feel the exasperation of his wife's temper over his endless procrastinations and objections, in the following letter written by her to her husband's legal adviser, Sir Fitzroy Kelly.

*“Sunday.*

“ DEAR SIR FITZROY,

“ I will not say ‘Yes.’ I say ‘No,’ most energetically to any proposal of shifting the miserable allowance of £400 a year.

“ It is the minimum of his own proposals (shifting and uncertain), spreading over twenty years, offered before he had half what he has now. In short, I won't; and there is an end of it. This is final. The Duke of Newcastle is my trustee.

“ I add this (as Mr. Norton always thinks time an utterly unimportant matter): that my bargain about my house is null and void if not complete by Christmas; and that I shall accordingly complete it at all risks; and that my publisher, who originally offered me £1,000 for my book for eight years' copyright, has sent an offer, signed, for £1,600, the copy-

right to return to me at the end of four years, and leave to publish in numbers, so as to control it for a while. That I could do this, and then get more from the law courts than ever Mr. Norton offered, is to me a matter of moral certainty.

"He may therefore do as he likes. The position of my son Brinsley, and the exasperation I feel at the stupid haggling which always goes on, makes it really not worth the toss of the dice which I do—the temptation to me being as strong as ever temptation was to human soul, to show him up—and the whole scheme of hypocrisy and pretence from the beginning to the end—towards his wife and sons.

"I am very sorry. I cannot write patiently; I begin by wishing to avoid, as you say, the inutilities of these hard phrases, but I cannot. When I think of his absurd struggle, with *his* income, still to leave himself a loophole not to continue paying the fraction out of it of a hundred pounds quarterly to the mother of his sons, he having my portion from my father of £1,500, besides all his own resources.

"With regret for my angry diffuseness, unconquered because unconquerable,

"Believe me,

"Yours truly,

"CAR. NORTON."

In the summer of 1854, shortly after the close of the Parliamentary session, she was recalled to Italy by the marriage of her son Brinsley to Maria Chiara Elisa Federigo, a young Italian lady, with whom he had fallen violently in love during his residence at Naples.

He could have found no more faithful or devoted wife. But the prospect of realising the promise of his early youth was doomed, for his health failed, and for the remainder of his life he was practically an invalid, and to a considerable extent dependent on his mother.

During the month of September, after his marriage, his mother made the acquaintance, in Venice, of Lady Eastlake, who wrote :

"Several evenings we went to the Piazza to listen to the band and gaze at the moonlight on St. Mark's, which looks as if made of silver and gold. Mrs. Norton generally joined us there, and I studied her. She is a beautiful and gifted woman; her talents are of the highest order, and she has carefully cultivated them, has read deeply, has a fine memory, and wit only to be found in a Sheridan. No one can compare with her in telling a story, so pointed, so happy, and so easy; but she is rather a professed story-teller, and brings them in, both in and out of season, and generally egotistically. Still she has only talents; genius she has nothing of, or of the genius nature; nothing of the simplicity, the pathos, the rapid changes from mirth to emotion.

"No, she is a perpetual actress, consummately studying and playing her part, and that always the attempt to fascinate—she cares not whom.

"Occasionally I got her to talk thoughtfully, and then she said things which showed great thought and observation, quite oracular and not to be forgotten. I felt at first that she could captivate me, but the glamour soon went off. If intellect and perfect self-possession and great affected deference for me could have subjugated me, I should have been her devoted admirer."

One is always running across this half-expressed arraignment of a manner too gracious, too eager to please, to be quite approved by those for whom reserve and restraint are the only sure tests of genuineness.

A letter from Mrs. Norton to Hayward, written from Paris three months later in the same year, is not without those rapid changes from mirth to emotion, that pathos which Lady Eastlake has taken for proof of the genius nature, and declared her so entirely lacking in :

"PARIS, December 8, 1854.

"MY DEAR AVOCAT,

"I do assure you I have seldom been so glad of any piece of news as to hear that you were to have the

Secretaryship of the Poor Law Board. As a recognition of ability and power to serve, it is pleasanter even than as a recognition of past services, in a different and political literary way, and I am sure no man ever deserved more from his friends, either for his energy in their behalf or the patience and generosity in all matters concerning himself. I suppose it is a very 'hard place,' as the maids say; but you have spirit and energy for anything, and have proved yourself labour-proof, a veritable salamander in the hot forge of hard work. All the better, too, is it that what you have at last been offered falls in with what you have written and occupied yourself about, as there can be none of the discontented growling which generally attends like a Greek chorus on occasions of anybody getting anything.

"As to my return, I linger, I scarcely know why, in the conviction that I shall only be tormented, without the balance of friends having time for me and my small drawing-room, or of my sisters being in town, and the belief that every one will disperse after a few days of Parliament. I have nothing here except the sort of dark security from trouble the mole has, who is underground, instead of ferreting about where a trap may pinch his neck and squeeze his bead eyes out of his head. (N.B. Not that my eyes are 'bead' eyes.) I meant to have gone home the week after I arrived here.

"I am vexed to hear poor accounts of the Duke of Newcastle's health. I wrote to him. I daresay he will hardly have time to read my letter.

"I scrawl yet another line, and say that poor Lady Ellis seemed very anxious about Sir Henry, who has taken drearily the news of Lockhart's death.

"Yours ever truly,  
"C. CLIENT."

From Paris she went to Ireland to be with her sister, Lady Dufferin, where we hear of her early in 1855, in one of Lady Dufferin's letters :

"We had two clever professors from the 'Godless College' at Belfast staying with us [at Clandeboye] last night. One had a wife with him to take care of

him, but the other, being defenceless, was instantly spiflicated by Caroline, whom we set at him, having no other way of amusing him, with permission to do her worst. The poor man was bowled over like a rabbit before he knew where he was, and is gone home in a frenzy of admiration ‘of that remarkable woman.’”

She was by this time fifty years old, old enough, one would think, to have begun to find out that her power of “bowling men over like rabbits” was not to last for ever; old enough to look back with a kind of impersonal amusement upon her beautiful youth. Indeed, there is something of this tone in a little letter written to Hayward in 1856 with reference to a new book of his, “Biographical and Critical Essays,” which contained, discreetly veiled, a mention of herself at a dinner in Hayward’s own chambers—the very dinner, in fact, which I have already described—just on the eve of her great break with her husband :

“Ho! Was it I who sounded so pretty in my one string of pearls? I was wondering who it could be among your large-eyed Queen Bees; but they have more pearls, and were not there.”

She goes on rather sadly, however :

“My novel stands still. I am worried and bothered about my second son, and I can’t sit at my desk like a tranquil author.

“I think the Government will crawl on and dry their wings like flies who have been rescued from the cream-jug till some stronger catastrophe cuts them off.

“Cantillon Keir wrote me that he was inspecting cattle at Buchanan by way of change. He stoops too much over his papers for health. I never saw such an attitude, except when Lord Nugent used to mimic a crow getting worms out of frosty ground—a piece of mimicking which he was fond of exhibiting in the ‘social hour’ of his frequent unbending from cares of State.

“Yours most truly,  
“C. CLIENT.”

The following letter is dated from Paris, where we find her with increasing frequency after the transfer of her eldest son from Naples to the French capital :

"Monday, September 3, 1855.

"DEAREST GEORGIE,

"Where are you, and what chance of Scotland ? I am very uncertain in my projects. Fletcher is not at all well—the worse instead of the better of his cure, and I think down-hearted at the doctor telling him his cough would remain, do what he would. Brin is at Florence. I have not yet heard of her [his wife's] confinement, which should be now taking place.

"Paris is so full, and so dear that it is abominable ; the Emperor very boastful and crowy.

"I went to see old Dejazet, her little feeble old legs dressed in blue breeches and her sweet little trilling but cracked voice singing military canzonets in *The Boyhood of Napoleon*. She is, I believe, a great-grandmother ; so runs the world away.

"I have been, however, little amused and anxious about Penny [Fletcher], who is sadly overworked, and being of a facile disposition all the others skip away (five away out of a staff of eight), and all the responsibility with Penny, as he is the chief at present ; even Cowley only comes into Paris from Chantilly to set tasks.

"The harvest is bad, and all very dear—the luxury of manufactures quite beyond belief. A swarm and glitter make up Paris ; how long it can last is another thing. A great deal will be cleared by the innkeepers during this Exhibition, but the crowd of visitors do not buy much, they tell me.

"Lucie Gordon is here staying with a Hindoo envoy. I met Victor Comins and Alfred de Vigny there. I laughed at one answer. One of the guests said to the Hindoo, 'Do you in your country accept the Mahomedan belief in the cow ?' 'We do nōte ; we do nōte beleefe in the cow, bōte there is greete beleefe in the bull, and he is moche beloved amongst us in consequence.'"

Even the funny story at the end does not quite do away with the melancholy impression left by this

letter ; but we are to have one more shining vision of Mrs. Norton before she goes down at last into the sad change of old age.

In 1858 the historian Motley was in London. He was at Lady Stanley's at one of Thackeray's lectures on "The Four Georges."

"After the lecture was over I expected to slip away unnoticed, but Lady Stanley came to me and talked with great kindness, and introduced me to several persons, all of whom said I was no stranger, or words to that effect. Then Lady Airlie said to me, 'Mrs. Norton wishes to make your acquaintance.'

"I turned and bowed, and there she was, looking to-day almost as handsome as she has always been. She is rather above middle height. In her shawl and crinoline of course I could not pronounce upon her figure. Her face is certainly extremely beautiful. The hair is raven black—violet black, without a thread of silver ; the eyes very large, with dark lashes, and black as death ; the nose straight, the mouth flexible and changing, with teeth which in themselves would make the fortune of an ordinary face. Such is her physiognomy ; and when you add to this extraordinary poetic genius, descent from that famous Sheridan who has made talent hereditary in his family, a low, sweet voice and a flattering manner, you can understand how she twisted men's heads off and hearts out ; we will not be particular how many years ago.

"She said, 'Your name is upon every lip.' I blushed and looked like a donkey. She added, 'It is agreeable, is it not ?' I had grace enough to add, 'You ought to know, if any one.' And then we talked of other things.

"She told me she should be happy to see more of me. A day or two afterwards, accordingly, I went to call on her. She received me with great kindness, and was very agreeable. She has a ready, rapid way of talking, alludes with perfect aplomb to her interminable quarrel with Mr. Norton. She spoke of her two sons, one of whom is heir to a peerage and the other to beggary. She showed me a photo of this second one, who is evidently her darling, and who by



MRS. NORTON.

From a drawing by Mrs. Munro-Ferguson.



way of improving his prospects in life married a year ago a peasant girl of the island of Capri. Mrs. Norton does not even think her very handsome, but says that he imagines her perfection, particularly in her fancy costume. She knew Webster when he was here, and admired him very much. She is also very intimate with the Queen of Holland. I do not know that I have much more to chronicle of her conversation. She was always animated and interesting. My impressions of what she must have been were confirmed; certainly it was a most dangerous, terrible, beautiful face in its prime, and is very handsome still."

In the letters of this sympathetic observer, who was afterwards to become not only a close friend but a close family connection, we meet Mrs. Norton again and again. He goes to Wimbledon to a breakfast party given by her sister, whom we have already learned to admire as Lady Seymour.

"I found Mrs. Norton looking out for me, to introduce me to the Duchess of Somerset. This lady was, as you may recollect, the famous Queen of Beauty at the Eglinton tournament a good many years ago. Her daughter, Lady Ulrica St. Maur, is a very beautiful girl, closely resembling her mother, and obviously reproducing, perhaps in an inferior degree, what the Queen of Beauty of the tournament must have been in the blaze of her beauty. Lady Dufferin I hardly saw, although I was presented to her, for at the same moment the two sons of the house came up to me and began to talk. One of them, apparently about twenty, had just returned from India, where he had been, not with the army exactly, but a kind of spectator or volunteer. He seemed intelligent and very handsome. The other, Lord Edward St. Maur, was a very bright, good-humoured lad of about fourteen. He said he had never travelled, but the very first tour he made he was determined should be to America.

"I then went with Mrs. Norton into the *salle à manger*, and while we were there a plain, quiet, smallish individual in a green cutaway coat, large yellow waistcoat and plaid trousers, came in for some

luncheon, and Mrs. Norton instantly presented me to him. It was Lord John Russell."

But at the end of a somewhat long conversation with the ex-Prime Minister, Mrs. Norton again took possession of him.

"Nothing can be kinder than she," Mr. Motley asserts over and over again. "I feel as if I had known her for years, and I am satisfied she does not dislike me, or she would not be presenting me to everybody worth knowing. While I was talking to her she said: 'Oh there is my lover, I must go and speak to him.' She then went up to a plain-looking benevolent little old gentleman in a white hat and a kind of old-world look about him that seemed to require a pig-tail and white top boots. She whispered to him a moment, and he came forward beamingly, saying, 'Delighted, I am sure, to make Mr. Motley's acquaintance,' and shook me by the hand. This was the old Marquis of Lansdowne, late President of the Council."

Mr. Motley goes on to describe a dinner at Lansdowne House.

"The hostess is Lord Lansdowne's daughter-in-law, Lady Shelburne, who is pretty and pleasing. The company consisted of Mrs. Norton, Dean Milman and his wife, Lord Macaulay, Lady Dufferin and her son Lord Dufferin, Hayward, Miss Thellusson, and a gentleman whose name I did not hear—rather a small party for so large a room. I had on my left the young lady who declaimed so vigorously at Lady Stanley's, and who is intelligent and agreeable. On my right I had the good luck to have Lady Dufferin, whom before I had scarcely seen. She is extremely agreeable, full of conversation, with a charming manner, and has, or had, nearly as much beauty and almost as much genius as her sister, Mrs. Norton, with a far better fate. At table by wax-light she looked very handsome, with a wreath of white roses on her black hair: while her son, a very handsome youth of near thirty, sat near her looking like her brother. Old Lord Lansdowne sat beaming and genial in the centre

of his system, and had evidently acquired a good deal of fresh warmth and radiance from Mrs. Norton, who sat next him, and had been looking handsomer than I had ever seen her before. She was dressed in white, and from where I sat it would have required a very powerful telescope to discover that she had passed thirty. . . . After dinner the conversation was miscellaneous, but Hayward, who is a *Quarterly* reviewer of some reputation and a diner-out, got into an argument with Macaulay about sculpture and painting, and the whole apple-cart of conversation was upset."

Mrs. Norton herself gave a dinner in her own little house in Chesterfield Street.

"She made the dinner for me, but she was somewhat disappointed in her company, several of the persons she wanted, among others Delane, having been engaged. The company consisted of the Marquis of Lansdowne, Lord Dufferin and his mother, Mr. Harcourt, Hayward the *Quarterly* reviewer and universal diner-out, the Earl of Gifford,<sup>1</sup> and Sir Hamilton Seymour."

Sir Hamilton Seymour was at the head of the British Legation at Lisbon when young Fletcher Norton was so ill there, and very kind to both mother and son on that unfortunate occasion. One is interested, therefore, to hear this much about him:

"Sir Hamilton Seymour is not especially describable. He is obviously intelligent, caustic, and apparently good-humoured, and with a good deal of the *usage du monde* to be expected in a veteran diplomatist. He is still comparatively young, but has laid himself up on a pension. I do not remember anything especially worth reporting of this dinner. The conversation rolled on the accustomed wheels. But

<sup>1</sup> The Earl of Gifford was the nobleman whom Lady Dufferin married on his deathbed in 1862. Motley describes him as "about thirty-five, plain-looking, intelligent, spectacled, and a sculptor of remarkable talent."

where two such persons as Mrs. Norton and Lady Dufferin were present, you may imagine that it was not slow. Mrs. Norton, however, was a good deal indisposed, so much so as to be obliged to leave the table. She recovered, however, and remained till 12.30 in her salon, at which time Hayward and myself retired. The descriptions of Mrs. Norton have not been exaggerated. In the noon of her beauty she must have been something wondrous."

At other times in this same little salon Mr. Motley came upon Stirling of Keir, whom he liked very much.

"He is mild, amiable, bald-headed, scholarlike, an M.P., and a man of large fortune and ancient family."

At another time he found Owen Meredith, or the old Marquis of Lansdowne toddled in and sat drinking in every word she said with great delight.

She also made arrangements for him to meet that very great lady and her own good friend, the Duchess of Sutherland.

"On Thursday I went with Mrs. Norton and Stirling by rail to Cliveden. I had received an invitation from the Duchess through Mrs. Norton, entirely unaware, as I had never been presented to her. I suppose you will like a description of her. There is something very plenteous and bountiful and sunny in her aspect. She is tall, and very large, and carries herself with a very good-natured stateliness. Her hair is blond-silvered, her features are large and well-chiselled, her smile is very beaming, and there is benevolence and sunshine in every look and word. With her ripe, autumnal, exuberant person and radiating expression, she looks like a personified Ceres, and ought always to be holding a cornucopia in her right hand."

And not long after we find Mr. Motley at Frampton Court on a visit to Brinsley Sheridan, whom he finds to have "a good deal of the family fascination, being still very handsome, with a very winning address." By this time he had met all the survivors of that

brilliant, beautiful group of brothers and sisters which made such an impression on Fanny Kemble when she first saw them assembled together in Mrs. Norton's crowded little drawing-room at Storey's Gate a whole generation before.

A new measure of impressions, new standards of comparison had come into use in the meantime, and we might have reason to mistrust the romantic description of the gifted young actress in the reign of William IV. if we did not find it thus strengthened and confirmed by one of our own cool-blooded countrymen, a man whom we may still fairly think of as one of our own times. But so it is; and indeed it is pleasant to be thus convinced that the tradition of the Sheridan wit and the Sheridan beauty is founded on a reality so strong, so vital, so unrelated to any changing fashion, that Mrs. Norton would seem just as enchanting, just as beautiful by the very last standards of the present as she did to her own generation, which is the past.

## CHAPTER XXI

DEATH OF FLETCHER—"THE LADY OF LA GARAYE"—  
"LOST AND SAVED"

IT is well that we should have this last radiant glimpse of Mrs. Norton before she entered into the shadow of her melancholy closing years.

At the beginning of 1859 she was in Edinburgh during the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Robert Burns. The following letter is one she wrote to Hayward on that occasion :

"DEAR AVOCAT,  
"EDINBURGH, January 27, 1859.

"I send by Post a *Scotsman*, because there are some lines by me on Burns. Pray go to-and-fro praising them! It did not occur to me to try for the 'Crystal Prize,' but you see it is won by a woman—huzza! Miss Isabel Craig is Scottish by birth, and was humble in position, having begun by making stocks for gentlemen's neckcloths. She afterwards wrote for *Scotsman* and *Chambers*, and was after that, female secretary to a Society—I think called, for the "Promotion of Social Science"—in Waterloo Place.

"I have long admired her, and read her poems to Lady Falkland when she was ill last summer. I hope you will like my lines; on the Poet and Man—not Angel! and so I say good-bye.

"I missed the Ayr dinner, which I intended to have contemplated, by catching a cold walking in the wind and rain, in petticoats as short as Tam o'Shanter's Witch's sark.

" Stirling also caught a bad cold (not from adopting a feminine costume) and was unable to attend the dinner. *He* meant to have gone to Ayr.

" Edinburgh was very quiet on the 'Centenary' day. Even the enthusiasm of the Scotch is *frappé à la glace*. It is a new acquaintance, and they don't feel familiar enough with it to be jolly—and think of three thousand sitting down to Temperance tea-trays! I'd as lief be a duck and sit in a pond with my chin upon duckweed. As it is, my chin is obliged to rest on the edge of a warm gruel-bowl, where with disconsolate snufflings I consider whether a hundred years hence (when it can do me no good) people will be reading 'Hayward's biography of that remarkable woman,' and going to look at the turnpike gate on the road from Guildford to Shalford on the scene of inspiration for the story of Rosalie. Adieu!

" The by - you - appreciated - and - indeed - over - complimented-and-patiently-indulged-but-by-many-others-not-sufficiently-valued Poetess,

" CAROLINE NORTON,  
*alias*

" CAROLINE CLIENT."

But the autumn of 1859 brought the great catastrophe of her later life—the death of her eldest son Fletcher of consumption, at the British Embassy in Paris, in the very room where his uncle Charles had died of the same disease twelve years earlier.

The loss of this son was a crushing blow, from which she never really recovered. There still exists in the possession of one of her nieces a long letter she wrote on this occasion describing his last illness and last hours. The whole letter is as impressive as the genius of its writer could make it; poignantly simple, yet full of that strange intensity of thought and sensation which comes to some minds in periods of exceptional suffering, as if each smallest sensation received, it may be, almost unconsciously at the time, had been burned into the brain by fire.

She begins at the moment when, almost in his usual health, he left her in Chesterfield Street, where he had

been passing his leave, to go back to Paris to prepare for his departure to his new post at Athens, where his mother expected to accompany him. But he was ill when she rejoined him, almost immediately, in Paris. The letter goes on to describe her alarm at the change which had taken place in him during even those few days ; his exceeding weakness, which continued and increased and would not respond to treatment, till at last death came by the gradual extinction of all physical forces, all power to go on living.

He said with a sigh one day, "I did not know it was so painful to die merely of exhaustion."

Indeed, so intangible was his malady that it was some time before they resigned themselves to the knowledge that it was to be fatal, and for some time she went on bravely with what she afterwards described as the thing so difficult in this world as to be almost impossible—the task of amusing an invalid when you know (though the sufferer does not know) that he is dying. To quote again from the letter :

"He was very fond of music, and on September 28 (just a fortnight before he died) I got some Tyrolean to sing in an outer room, but he was already very weak, and one of their pieces was the imitation of the bells of a mountain village dying away in the distance, and he was moved to tears, and I sent them away. The last music he ever heard was his brother's singing to the guitar, and even that was heard from the inner room, where Brin sat playing and singing as low as he could control his strong voice ; and even that tried Fletcher, so that we never did more in that way.

"The morning of the day he died he said, 'I feel very strange.'

"I said, 'Worse, dear?'

"He said, 'No, dear. Don't look at me with such kingdom-come eyes. I only feel strange. There is no other way of expressing it.'

"I said to Dr. Chepmell (who stayed with him most

anxiously and kindly), ‘If he does not rally to-day, he will never rally at all.’

“Dr. Chepmell said, ‘It is a critical day.’

“I afterwards learned that he had said Fletcher would not live forty-eight hours.”

But it seemed to come suddenly at last.

Not only his brother, but his father had been sent for as soon as his condition became alarming, and were with him when he died ; and his mother again saw her husband, whom she had met last in court, when she had hardly been able to bear it because in his eagerness for his own defence he had come and sat down beside her as near as the skirting-board of the court would allow. He was much nearer now, kneeling with bowed head on the other side of his son’s couch, where Fletcher lying, with his head on his mother’s shoulder, could see and speak to him. Almost the last words the young man said were addressed to him, “Dear father.”

Mrs. Norton goes on :

“Towards evening he said, *‘Quelle étrange nuit !’* Then after a silence, ‘I do not see you—any of you—dear ones. But I see, oh ! what is it I see ? So many—so many—so beautiful. Beautiful.’ It is impossible for words to describe, or for those who saw it ever to forget, the wonderful radiance of his face while he said this, or the expression of earnest ecstasy in the beautiful eyes that no longer saw the things of earth. No picture of saints and martyrs that I ever beheld equalled the intense beauty or rapt look of his countenance. He said in a soft, sad tone, ‘Mother.’ That was the last word he ever spoke.

“We could scarcely tell when he died, but the restlessness, the sadness, and the ecstasy all passed out of his face, and there was nothing but peace ; and we had only to close his beautiful, soft eyes, that from the hour they opened on this world had never looked hardly, or scornfully, or unkindly on any human being. I am thankful, when so many women have

soldier sons dying far away from them, that I was permitted to witness this blessed, gentle creature go from us in such peace. ‘The coffin rested the night before it was carried to England to be buried, at the Church of the Madeleine in Paris, where he used to attend the service on Sundays.’ It was transported next day to England, to Kettlethorpe, in Yorkshire. He lies buried there now, in the same grave with my little Willie, who died years ago from the effects of a fall from his pony. A chapel which formerly stood on Wakefield Bridge, in memory of the young Duke of York, who was killed there in 1460, and which Mr. Norton had formerly bought and had removed to his grounds, was hung with black to receive the coffin previous to interment. And it was carried round the little lake over the green sward without the sound of a footfall, or any sound but the singing of the birds in a tiny island in the lake, opposite the door of the chapel. On the stone that covers him is engraved, ‘*Parva Domus, Magna Quies.*’

“A more patient sufferer never went to his rest ; nor did parents ever lose a son of more promise. He was fond of his profession, understood many foreign languages, wrote well in verse and prose, but was more humble and diffident than any one I ever was acquainted with. We lived together in many different countries, and wherever he once lived I am sure he has left friends who will regret him and be sorry for our loss.”

Many months after Fletcher’s death she wrote again on the same subject, but this time in poetry. In her own words about one of her own heroines, “she lamented in verse when she ceased to lament in tears. Ah ! believe, she lamented still.”

### “IN THE STORM

“*In Memory of My Son*

“Written at Taymouth, Perthshire.

“If, going forth in the snow and the hail,  
In the wind and the rain,  
On the desolate hills, in the face of the gale,  
I could meet thee again,

"Ah ! with what rapture my bosom would beat  
And my steps onward pass,  
With a smile on my lip, while the thin driving sleet  
Soaked through the grass.

"But never—the hour can never have birth  
That would gladden me thus ;  
There are meetings, and greetings, and welcomes on earth,  
But no more for us.

"No more shall thy letters come in with the morn,  
Making sunshine for hours,  
With thoughts of an innocent tenderness born,  
Or a spray of dried flowers ;

"With praises whose love used to cheer and to bless,  
Running through every line ;  
And fond closing words that felt like a caress  
Which thy soul gave to mine.

"The grey clouds are scudding in vaporous shrouds  
O'er a sky dark as lead :  
I think of the tombs that are planted in crowds—  
Pale homes of the dead.

"I think does the same wind that sweeps by me now,  
As it shivers and moans,  
Thrill the pools in that graveyard of half-melted snow,  
By the moss-dripping stones ?

"And I cry in my anguish, 'Appear, as in life—  
And my soul shall not fear ;  
Pass over this sea of my trouble and strife.'  
But the winds only hear.

"The rush of the wild river rolling along  
Is loud in my ear—  
The wind through the beech-trees is heavy and strong,  
But that sound cometh clear.

"The turbulent waters drive on in their force,  
Like the thoughts in my breast—  
But the stones lying deep in the torrent's wild course,  
Say : 'Under is rest.'

"Under, deep under ! But lo ! While I dream,  
From a vanishing cloud  
The pale moon looks forth, with her strange, tranquil gleam,  
Like a ghost in its shroud.

"And I think of the rest in the dark waters near,  
    To its stony bed given ;  
And I think of that light shining gentle and clear ;  
    'There is rest too, in heaven.'

"Till the wild storm subsiding, forth comes by the moon  
    One unrising star ;  
Is there rest? but the earth seems so near, as I swoon,  
    And the heavens so far!"

She writes to her sister from Dinan, in Brittany, where she spent the first months after her bereavement :

*"December 12.*

"DEAR GEORGIE,

"Thank you for writing to me about Nell. I am sorry I did not tell you I was here; but I am more dead than alive half my time, and the other half I spend on Brin's little ones and their odd home here. . . .

"This place is strange and beautiful. A small town built on a height with a bastion all round, and immense towers and gateways; the most lovely valley, 'la vallée des Noyers,' lies outside, and you seem looking down into another world as you look into it over the rampart wall outside the church. But I have been so ill here I have scarcely seen anything. Brin has a comfortable, though rather shut-in lodging, with a woman who understands embroidery for the priests' vestments in the churches of Brittany.

"He is poorly, irritable, and dejected, and Mariuccia very anxious. The children are well, poor darlings! and come eagerly of a morning to the little boarding-house just outside the town where I live.

"I am going away now, if I am well enough for the journey. I shall be glad to know poor dear Nell safe home—not selfishly, but for her. I see you think it would comfort me, but there are strokes for which there is no comfort; no one can come or go now that will make any difference to me.

"The stately ships move on  
    To their haven under the hill' ;

but it is ended for me in this world; all gleams of better days were with him, and have gone out into darkness."

There is a little note from her to her publishers, written on her return to England, which I give, because it shows how utterly she had let go life's weary tasks for a time after her son's death, but also how soon she resumed them.

"CHESTERFIELD STREET, MAYFAIR,  
"February 6, 1860.

"GENTLEMEN,

"I will correct the brief biography I found lying here on my return to England, if you will inform me whether the book is already printed off or not, as I see the date of your letter is December last.

"Yours obli'd,  
"C. N.

"I cannot say the notice you sent is correct.

"TO MESSRS. RICHARD GRIFFIN & CO., *Publishers,*  
"AVE MARIA LANE."

Mrs. Norton's last long poem, "The Lady of La Garaye," the only one of her works which is easily attainable to-day, was published by Macmillan late in 1861. In the first edition both frontispiece and vignette on the title-page were hers—not only her sketches, but done by her on the wooden block from which the impression was printed. The portrait of the Lady of La Garaye is a copy of an authentic picture which Mrs. Norton had found in one of the religious houses of Dinan, the sketch of the ruined château and its ivy-covered gateway having been made originally by herself during the summer after her son's death, part of which she spent in Brittany.

In regard to the poem itself, she hastens to inform us in her introduction :

"Nothing is mine but the language in which it is

told. I have respected that mournful romance of real life too much to spoil its lessons with any poetical licence.”

It is the story of a noble lady, hopelessly crippled by a fall from her horse in the first years of her marriage, and of all the long remainder of her life spent by her and her devoted husband in the care of those sick and crippled like herself. In its day it was much admired and much read, and is still remembered, if not read, by those on whose youth it made its first impression. Its superiority over her other efforts in narrative and descriptive poetry is so marked as to put her quite in another class of poetic achievement from that which, without it, she would be qualified to occupy.

We find in it, indeed, all her old faults, her diffuseness of style and superabundance of ornament; all her old limitations towards ultimate truth and speculative thought; but never more pardonably than in its pages, because the story itself and its surroundings were such as gained rather than lost by the wealth of radiant imagery which came almost too easily at her bidding, while the story's lesson, that noble conclusion of a broken and tragic youth, was the one of all others she was most competent to treat—the one most fit to inspire all that was lovely and beautiful in her eager fancy.

Every page of the poem is a confession of her own deepest beliefs, her strongest consolations, her last entrenched illusions. And reading it, we are still amazed by the unextinguishable youthfulness of this spirit, the hold it still retains upon joy and hope, and all the nobler pleasures of sense and emotion, in spite of the long struggle her life had been between her own insistent desire for happiness and the fate which almost from the beginning seemed to have put all happiness beyond her grasp.

The poem is dedicated to Lord Lansdowne.

"Friend of old days, of suffering, storm, and strife,  
 Patient and kind through many a wild appeal ;  
 In the arena of thy brilliant life  
 Never too busy or too cold to feel :

"To thee I dedicate this record brief  
 Of foreign scenes and deeds too little known ;  
 This tale of noble souls who conquered grief  
 By dint of tending sufferings not their own.

"Thou hast known all my life : its pleasant hours,  
 How many of them have I owed to thee ?  
 Its exercise of intellectual powers,  
 With thoughts of fame and gladness not to be.

"Thou knowest how Death for ever dogged my way,  
 And how of those I loved the best, and those  
 Who loved and pitied me in life's young day,  
 Narrow and narrower still the circle grows.

"Thou knowest—for thou hast proved—the dreary shade  
 A first-born's loss casts over lonely days :  
 And gone is now the pale, fond smile, that made  
 In my dim future, yet, a path of rays.

"So that my very soul is wrung with pain,  
 Meeting old friends whom most I love to see.  
 Where are the younger lives, since these remain ?  
 I weep the eyes that should have wept for me.

"But all the more I cling to those who speak  
 Like thee, in tones unaltered by my change ;  
 Greeting my saddened glance, and faded cheek,  
 With the same welcome that seemed sweet and strange

"In early days : when I, of gifts made proud,  
 That could the notice of such men beguile,  
 Stood listening to thee in some brilliant crowd,  
 With the warm triumph of a youthful smile.

"Oh, little now remains of all that was.  
 Even for this gift of linking measured words,  
 My heart oft questions, with discouraged pause,  
 Does music linger in the slackened chords ?

"Yet, friend, I feel not that all power is fled,  
 While offering to thee, for the kindly years,  
 The intangible gift of thought, whose silver thread  
 Heaven keeps untarnished by our bitterest tears.

“So, in the brooding calm that follows woe,  
 This tale of La Garaye I fain would tell,  
 As, when some earthly storm hath ceased to blow,  
 And the huge, mounting sea hath ceased to swell :

“After the maddening wrecking and the roar,  
 The wild high dash, the moaning sad retreat,  
 Some cold slow wave creeps faintly to the shore,  
 And leaves a white shell at the gazer’s feet.

Another friend of Mrs. Norton’s was quite as beautifully remembered in the same poem—Sidney Herbert.

A short time after the great agitation of the Corn Laws in August 1846, Mr. Herbert had married Elizabeth, daughter of General Charles Ashe à Court, whom he had known as a child. Indeed, there is a story that while Miss à Court was still a little girl she had already made up her mind about the handsome lad whom she often saw at her father’s place in Wiltshire, and openly announced that when she grew up she was going to marry “that boy.”

Mr. Herbert was Secretary of State at War while the British army was at the Crimea, and came in for a great deal of the blame showered upon the War Office for the breakdown of the British commissariat at that time. His tireless service during these trying years had seriously injured his health, but he had remained at his post, except for a few months when his friends were out of power, initiating and carrying out reforms which late experience had shown to be so necessary in the army, until he was suddenly struck down by Bright’s disease and died in November 1861.

“Even as I write,” says Mrs. Norton,

“Before me seem to rise,  
 Like stars in darkness, well-remembered eyes,  
 Whose light but lately shown on earth’s endeavour,  
 Now vanished from this troubled world for ever.  
 Oh, missed and mourned by many, I being one,—  
 Herbert, not vainly thy career was run ;  
 Nor shall Death’s shadow, and the folding shroud,  
 Veil from the future years thy worth allowed

Since all thy life thy single hope and aim  
Was to do good, not make thyself a name,—  
'Tis fit that by the good remaining yet,  
Thy name be one men never can forget.  
Oh, Eyes I first knew in our mutual youth,  
So full of limpid earnestness and truth ;  
Eyes I saw fading still, as day by day  
The body, not the spirit's strength, gave way ;  
Eyes that I last saw lifting their farewell  
To the now darkened window where I dwell,  
And wondered, as I stood there sadly gazing,  
If Death were brooding in their faint upraising ;  
If never more thy footstep light should cross  
My threshold stone—but friends bewail thy loss,  
And She be widowed young, who lonely trains  
Children that boast thy good blood in their veins ;  
Fair eyes, your light was quenched while men still thought  
To see those tasks to full perfection brought.

Brave heart, true soldier's son ; set at thy post,  
Deserting not till life itself was lost ;

Be thy sons like thee. Sadly as I bend  
Above the page, I write thy name, lost friend.  
With a friend's name this brief book did begin,  
And a friend's name shall end it : names that win  
Happy remembrance from the great and good ;  
Names that shall sink not in oblivion's flood,  
But with clear music, like a church bell's chime,  
Sound through the river's sweep of onward-rushing Time."

The following years only brought new losses. The tragedy of old age, it would seem, had fairly begun for Mrs. Norton. There was much, however, besides the natural losses of old friends, the natural diminution of health and courage, to make these last twenty years of her life an even more melancholy struggle than any that had gone before them.

In 1855 her first grandchild, Richard Norton, had been born at Capri ; in 1856 came a little girl, Carlotta, and, by a strange irony of fate which had deprived her of the infancy of her own children, both boy and girl became at a very early age her especial possession, and she had again the care and companionship of young children at a time when such care and com-

panionship is often a greater anxiety than a pleasure. There is no sign, however, that her grandchildren's residence with her was anything but a joy to Mrs. Norton. Till he was old enough to be sent to school, her grandson Richard slept in her own room, and both children were constantly with her.

There is a little note written to her old friend, Sir Alexander Duff Gordon, which gives a characteristic glimpse of her at this time :

"No, dear Sir Aleck. It went to Frampton to be signed; I would it were a matter of indifference to me to get it; but grandchildren now come chirping like birds to be fed, besides all former claims."

I hope Lucie is better. I am never in town two days at a time, and have never got to Esher.

"Yours most truly,  
"C. N."

Early in 1863 she brought out the novel, "Lost and Saved," published by Messrs. Hurst & Blackett, on which she had long been at work, in which she had been so often interrupted since its first conception during one of her brief periods of calm happiness—a summer spent at Wiesbaden with her eldest son, Fletcher, shortly after the flattering reception of her "Stuart of Dunleath."

Here, as usual, she had made new friends, among others the Earl of Essex, to whom we find her dedicating the novel when it finally appeared. For it was then and there, as she herself narrates in this same dedication, "while my boy and your girl rode laughing races through woods of Wiesbaden, and you and I took more cheerful walks than I can ever take again; when your beautiful and pleasant sisters were 'new friends,' and we all hoped to make but one family," that the idea of this novel was born.

By her own announcement, Beatrice, the heroine, is an attempt on her part—the result of many jesting conversations between this "new friend" and herself—

to make a woman's character on the lines Lord Essex professed most to admire. Whether by accident, or by a still more subtle connection of cause and effect, no other heroine of Mrs. Norton's so closely resembles herself as the heroine of "Lost and Saved."

"She was quick, ardent, and sensitive ; capable of all sacrifice for those she loved ; capable of all energy for that which she desired to attain ; full of eagerness ; full of enthusiasm ; pitiful and tender. Something of a rarer earnestness was in her than in others, and warmed you, while she spoke, like a flame. It is in vain to argue the matter ; there is as much difference of sensation in different persons as there is difference in their physical strength or intellectual capacities. One can't draw, another can't sing, and a third can't feel. There are apathetic creatures, to whom passionate love, wild grief, aching compassion, are mysteries as great as magic. Disturbed, embarrassed, incredulous, with a strong repugnance to what they call a scene, they shrink like sea-anemones, and draw in the cold flabby feelers of their minds at any evidence of emotion in others.

"Beatrice was the reverse of all this. She enjoyed more, she suffered more, she felt more than a great proportion of her fellow-creatures. Life thrilled through her, as you may see it thrill, in the delight of sunshine, through a butterfly's closed wings. And to such as she, in whom the visible world and the life of sensation predominate, the temptations of this world are the most powerful. Her heart ached, the tears rushed to her eyes at some touching picture or some mournful song. The breath of a warm spring day, the scent of flowers, the purple of the distant hills, the freshness of the waves dashing in upon the shore, filled her with vague yearning.

"Such natures will not await the coming event ; they cannot watch the subtle alchemy of brooding days, even though the chance of a golden hour lie there. They are for ever wrestling before dawn with the dark angel of Destiny, reckless if their victory shall send them lamed and limping from Peniel."

The avowed intention of the book was to show how

sure such a creature was of coming to grief in the world Mrs. Norton herself knew best, the world of London society,

“Where women with shallow feelings, who tread the paths of sin sure-footed as Spanish mules on the edge of the Cordilleras, are indescribably welcome ; and where stupid, honest Beatrices, with their passionate affection and blind confidences in the base, and romantic notions of love and justice and universal sympathy are utterly abhorred.”

It is the story of a beautiful young girl, gradually entangled by a series of very plausible accidents, one of which is a mock marriage, into what is commonly known as a life of sin, as the mistress of a young man of high rank and the mother of his illegitimate child. Rather a hazardous situation, we must confess, and one needing careful treatment if it was to be acceptable by the standards laid down for English fiction during the reign of Queen Victoria ! We are not surprised, therefore, to find the book severely criticised as not fit to lie upon a lady's table. And, indeed, we are forced to admit that such criticism was not without a certain kind of justification. It was not so much that the heroine was neither wife nor maid through the greater part of the story. Treated with a proper discretion, the young mother whose hand shows no marriage-ring is not an unheard-of appearance in the pages of Victorian fiction. The trouble was that under Mrs. Norton's treatment the whole threadbare situation became alive, convincing, a thing of her own day, her own class, her own and others' observation ; and, as such, we can hardly wonder that it was judged unfit to be given to the reader for whom all English fiction of that day was especially prepared and adapted—the young unmarried girl.

It was also said of it that the leading characters were, if not portraits, at least very intimate studies of

Mrs. Norton's own friends and acquaintances, especially the Marchioness of Updown, the fat, vulgar, great lady, who serves as the principal victim of Mrs. Norton's lively wit. And this accusation is, no doubt, in some measure true, could not fail to be true with a writer like Mrs. Norton, in whom the power of creative imagination never approached the fineness of her observation, and whose peculiar genius lay in the force and vividness with which she put her own impressions into words.

It is quite possible, therefore, that this same Marchioness of Updown was suggested, if not entirely inspired, by Lady —, one of the clique at Court who did what they could to prevent Mrs. Norton from showing her face there again after the Melbourne scandal.

She was safely off the stage of action at the time of the publication of "Lost and Saved." The lady is thus described in Mrs. Norton's lively pages :

"Though her husband was neither wise nor great, but a fat, foolish man, with a meek, fidgety temper—and there are, as we know, no less than twenty-one marquises in the British Peerage—she somehow contrived to be the greatest lady that ever was seen out of a fairy tale. Her sisters called her 'the Marchioness,' as the servants did. Her husband called her 'the Marchioness.' It seemed as if there was no other Marchioness in the world. If there was a ball, party, or soirée to be given, her absence was as bitter as that of the hero of the old-fashioned song, 'Robin Adair.' If there was a procession, coronation, or festive ceremony of any kind, the world stood on its axis till the Marchioness had a place assigned to her. She went to Court, not spangled with scattered diamonds, like the sky on a fine night, but crusted over with them, like barnacles on a ship's hull. Every year her arms were rounder, her bracelets larger, her figure more corpulent. Every year the sweep of her full drapery encroached more and more on the ground occupied by her scantier neighbours. Every year her step became more flat-footed and imperious. In England she shone with the

splendour of a perpetual Catherine-wheel ; and abroad she represented, in the opinion of amazed foreigners, the style and condition of an English "Grande Dame."

The book abounds with descriptions as amusing as the one just given. Its chief interest for us, however, is in the character of Beatrice. Dissimilar as was her story from Mrs. Norton's own, it yet affords many and many descriptions which could only have originated in Mrs. Norton's own experience.

We see her with her own first child as she describes Beatrice—

"Seated opposite to the nurse, who held him on her lap, practising one of Gordigiani's perfect ballads ; and smiling at him while she sang, fancying that even to him the melody gave pleasure."

We see her struggling through one of her long, ungracious interviews with lawyers,

"Proceeding with that rambling fluency which all women, even very intelligent women, employ in endeavouring to explain themselves on matters of business. Mr. Grey listened with increasing severity and disapprobation. Her occasional tears did not touch him ; her appealing looks, from time to time, when urging some especial point, only irritated him. This was neither the time nor place for such coquetry. He did not like such eyes."

We get a glimpse of one of those fits of stormy passion which often compromised her own case and alienated her well-wishers in her own endless struggles against her husband's injustice ; though here it is Beatrice she describes—

"Resisting the truth till resistance was no longer possible, and then, when convinced that her visitor really was breaking to her some new dreadful phase in her life, she passed to the wildest frenzy of reproach to him personally, for being<sup>1</sup> the bearer of such ill-

tidings. She positively stamped her foot as she bade the old soldier be gone and not insult her farther by his presence ; and finally, becoming apparently conscious of the ceaseless cries of little Frank, who wailed as all young children do at stormy speaking among their elders, she snatched the boy up as passionately as she had laid him down, strained him hard to her breast, and dropping back in her chair burst into sobbing tears.

"Under that shower the General beat a rapid retreat, incensed and alienated ; thinking her wanting in dignity, modesty, and proper conduct, and resolving to communicate anything he had to say to her in writing.

"But before the hot afternoon had waned away, a little note recalled him ; it said :

"'Forgive my violence—I want to ask you one question, only one—and then I will give you no more trouble. I am very miserable—do come back to me.'"

And there is a charming little hint of the author's practical experience as a woman earning her daily bread, and obliged to go often unattended :

"It is a dream of romancists that your heroine's beauty cannot be seen without attracting as much attention as a comet. If a woman be modestly dressed, simple in manner, and obviously going about her own avocations, she may walk—I do not say through Paris, but be it said to the credit of Englishmen, certainly through any street in London—with perfect security. Beatrice Brooke was as beautiful a woman as could be seen or imagined ; but she reached Stratton Street without adventure and without remark beyond that passing glance which Moore and Byron have both commemorated in poetry as given to faces we sometimes meet 'in the world's crowd,' and whose recurring loveliness comes back to us whenever we dream of beauty."

I should not have given so many of these extracts if the book from which they are taken was more easily attainable. I could have given many more equally

vivid, equally illuminating both of the habit of mind and the actual experiences of the woman who wrote them. I have given enough, I hope, to convince those who are inclined to judge her novels as old-fashioned and out of date, that this one, at least, will well repay any reader who is fortunate enough to come across it ; fortunate I say, for like so much else she has written, it is so nearly out of print that it is almost by chance that one can obtain a copy of it.

## CHAPTER XXII

### LAST YEARS—DEATH OF GEORGE NORTON—SECOND MARRIAGE—DEATH

MRS. NORTON's last long novel, "Old Sir Douglas," appeared in book form early in 1867, having come out first periodically in *Macmillan's Magazine*, reprinted for the American public in *Littell's Living Age*. To those of the present generation who were introduced to this story in the bound volumes of either of those periodicals, "Old Sir Douglas" is a very pleasant recollection.

The book, however, does not bear rereading as well as her earlier stories. It is discursive, full of inconsistent and often sensational incident, gathered hurriedly, it would seem, out of the flotsam and jetsam of her own long experience, and put together in a rather palpable effort to interest and amuse. But even in "Old Sir Douglas" there are many charming and touching bits of description. The account, for instance, of the childhood of Sir Douglas and his brother, two little motherless Scottish boys brought up under the dominion of a harsh, unloving step-mother, has too much similarity with the fate of her own children not to have been written out of the very depths of her heart. The description of Naples, too, and of the poor wild lad who came to such grief there, has an added interest from Mrs. Norton's own associations with Southern Italy.

The book was to have been dedicated to Lady Dufferin, Mrs. Norton's favourite sister, but before it was finished Lady Dufferin had died of a long and painful illness, and the name of her son, instead of herself, appears on the first page.

The death of this favourite sister was an irreparable loss to Mrs. Norton, though when Motley saw her a little later in the same year he found her upon the whole "in pretty good spirits and particularly agreeable."

Mr. Motley's intimacy with the whole Sheridan connection had been confirmed and strengthened by the marriage of his second daughter, Mary, with a son of Mr. Brinsley Sheridan, and it was during one of his frequent visits to Frampton Court that he speaks thus of his old friend :

"She continues to take it for granted that I am going to stay here as long as she does, and that I am to make a long visit at Keir, where she goes next month. I have undeceived her, but she continues to know best. Carlotta is here, and she trots about quietly and gently, and seems very obedient and well-disposed."

These long autumn visits to Keir, where in later years Mrs. Norton was often accompanied by her grandchildren, had suffered no interruption by Mr. Stirling's marriage in 1865 with his distant cousin, Anna, third daughter of the Earl of Leven. In the same year Mr. Stirling had also succeeded to the title and estates of his mother's brother, Sir John Maxwell, and he is hereafter to be known in these pages as Sir William Stirling-Maxwell.

Motley speaks pleasantly of Lady Anna Stirling-Maxwell :

"I like Stirling's wife very much. She is decidedly handsome, with delicate, regular features, fair hair, and high-bred, gentle manners."

He goes on in the same letter to describe a dinner at the Stirling-Maxwells', where he met Mrs. Norton and Anthony Trollope, among a number of greater and less celebrities.

But from the time of Lady Dufferin's death till her own, the mention of ill-health and bad spirits becomes more and more frequent in her own letters. The following to Hayward is noticeable in this respect.

"FRAMPTON COURT, January 1868.

"DEAR AVOCAT,

"I get dreary in London, so fled back here where I am coated and packed in cotton. I have a constant pain in my side, and consider that I shall shortly be a Saint and a Martyr with a halo round my departed head!

"Your Duncombe article is most clear, spirited, and true, and I ran my eyes to the end with great eagerness.

"The family say they never knew he had either wife or son! or who the man is who has published the Memoir!

"I assure you it was not Lord Alvanley, but my brother Charlie, who made the jest (or *jeu de mots*) you quote, though immediately after, we heard it attributed (as all witty things were) to Lord Alvanley, and I said then, 'How sure they were to give that to a noted wit, instead of you, Charlie.'

"Some man (I can't recollect who) said with a stupid sneer, 'I'd be afraid even to leave my card on him, for fear he'd mark it.'

"'That would at least depend on whether he thought it a high honour,' Charlie said very quietly.

"But it was said rather in reproof of the fling at a man who was down, as Lord R—— then was.

"I have got 'More about Junius' with me, and am entirely absorbed in considering the great mystery.

"I shall be in town in February. Much remembrance from all here.

"Yours ever truly,

"C. CLIENT."

The Thomas Duncombe mentioned in this letter is the same whose appointment as one of Lord

Durham's suite on his unfortunate Canadian embassy brought such criticism upon his chief because of his own rather dubious reputation, both socially and politically, at the time. Mrs. Norton's knowledge of him had begun years before, when he came under her spell as a good-looking young captain, dandy, and duellist, during the great struggle of the Whig ladies to attract young men from the Tory party to the ranks of Whiggism and Reform.

She had become very large and heavy, and as she grew older had several serious falls, one of which, in the summer of 1869, was accompanied by a blow on the head, so severe as to delay the article she was at work on just then for *Macmillan*.

The article in question she herself had proposed to write on the life and works of her dear friend Lady Duff Gordon, dead that same summer from consumption, in Cairo, far away from friends and country. The article appeared at last in September, full of affectionate appreciation of the writer and real regret for the woman whose nature in many things was not unlike her own.

A personal letter to Lord Ronald Gower, a devoted younger son of the Duchess of Sutherland, tells of Mrs. Norton's grief for the death of a still closer and dearer friend :

" If to have loved and admired your dear mother more than any one I ever met out of my own home circle, more than any one I ever knew except my sister Helen, could give me a place in her children's remembrances, I can lay claim to such a recollection, even at this mournful and sacred time. However often one may have known a dear and familiar friend, I think there is always one occasion in which the face and form become, as it were, more visible to memory, as if the picture were taken then. I see for ever, in thinking of her, the sweet picture of her pitying face smilingly looking down on my boy, who was trying to thank her for all her goodness to me, and as she stood drawing

off a ring from her finger, which she gave to him, the very ideal of lovely kindness of soul.

"I think of you all. I think especially of the dear Duchess of Argyll. I knew her best. I know what this blank in life must be, though surely no children of any mother that ever lived and died among them could feel more blessed assurance that home on earth was exchanged for home 'eternal in the heavens.'"

Lady Palmerston's death was the end of another friendship, not so close indeed as Mrs. Norton's relation to the Duchess of Sutherland or Lady Duff Gordon, but very kind, very constant, and of long duration, reaching back as it did to a past before Lady Palmerston's second marriage, when she was still Lady Cowper, and her favourite brother was still William Lamb, with all his high office still to come to him.

A very charming notice of Lady Palmerston's life and character appeared in *The Times* a short time after her death, written by Abraham Hayward, who straightway sent the paper to his old friend and hers, Mrs. Norton, who was just then in Switzerland staying with the sister of her late brother-in-law, Lord Gifford. The following is Mrs. Norton's reply :

"VILLA LAMMERMOOR, GENEVA,  
"Friday, September 24, 1869.

"DEAR AVOCAT,

"Thanks for your good remembrance of me, in sending the article on Lady Palmerston. It has, I think, been delayed in delivery, as I only received it yesterday, and lucky to get it then, for I am just leaving this sweet place and expect, after one day's rest in Paris, to get home the middle of this week.

"You must not think I have not already guessed you as the author of the article in question, which I had read with eager interest.

"I think it much the best that has appeared; much the best thing of the kind that even you ever wrote—perfect in taste, feeling, and style. It is the most difficult of all tasks, that sort of posthumous notice;

and the steering between a real profound regret and admiration, and the consciousness that you are to explain grounds of regret and admiration, and call on strangers to share both feelings, requires rare tact of measurement, what to say and what to leave unsaid. That tact you certainly have shown, nor is there any over-praise in anything you have written.

"The trembling antennæ with which those who are near and dear must always approach and examine the lives of their dead, cannot be hurt by your lines; nor can strangers, in their carelessness, think them too personal in any comment on her own many merits. I have never heard particulars, wandering about as we have been; but you will tell me, if I miss seeing Lady H. Cowper in Paris, which of her children were with her, etc.

"This place is delicious, and Lady Emily charming, reminding me much, in a certain earnestness and simplicity, of Gifford, her brother, and full of information and ability of various kinds. Very musical also, which is a joy to me at all times: one of the few pleasures neither age nor sadness can make one indifferent to.

"Baroness Adolf de Rothschild has a much finer house, but, in my opinion, not nearly so pretty a place, close by. She is an old Naples friend of mine, and I always thought her charming.

"I make my farewell by dining with her to-morrow, when I shall look my last on the blue lake, and turn into the dreadful railway tunnels.

"If you write, write to Chesterfield Street, 'not to be forwarded.' I think Wednesday will see me there.

"I heard of you from Stirling-Maxwell.

"Yours ever truly,

"C. CLIENT."

She went back, as usual, to a winter of hard work, the most dreary kind of literary hard work—hack work for the magazines. One of her friends speaking of her after her death says:

"In her later days she had survived her zest for popularity, and sometimes seemed almost as if she had learned to enjoy, or at all events to provoke, its opposite, preferring to write anonymously, and taking

as much pains with a criticism of a picture or a review of a new book as if her name had been prefixed at the beginning, or her well-known initials had been appended at the close."

But such a statement about her could never have been more than partly true. Her desire for popular applause, indeed, she may have outgrown somewhat before she died, but she never outgrew her sensitiveness to adverse criticism ; indeed, in her old age, all fault-finding became well-nigh intolerable to her, and too often in her later years she let herself go in impatient self-justification, not only in private, but in public replies to the reviews of her last novels ; to defend her "Lost and Saved" from the imputation of immorality ; and again when she was rather sharply used about "Old Sir Douglas."

Another thing that always exasperated her was the appropriation of earlier writings of her own, especially her songs and melodies, without proper acknowledgment of the source from which they were derived ; and she was at last betrayed into a long, acrimonious discussion on this subject in *The Times*—interesting chiefly when she tells how she came to write "Juanita," the most popular of her songs ; familiar still to every College Glee Club throughout the United States, in places and among people to whom its history and author will always be utterly unknown.

"Twenty years ago," she says in October 1871, "I composed a song, 'Juanita,' for one of my sons to sing to the guitar. It had a great vogue. It was not only extremely popular as a vocal piece, but was set by several instrumental composers as taken from the song published by me."

She goes on with some warmth to explain how the musician, Charles d'Albret, had lately included this same song in one of his own compositions without one word to tell to whom it really belonged.

The whole letter shows a great deal of unnecessary irritation over this very widespread grievance of both writers and composers, besides containing some unlucky statements which she afterwards found herself in some straits to support. Indeed, we must reluctantly confess that in the end Mrs. Norton came off rather badly, Mrs. Henry Wood, whom she had rashly accused of taking the idea of "East Lynne" from a sketch she herself had long before contributed to the *English Annual*, remaining undisputedly mistress of the field.

Her arrangements with her publishers were often unsatisfactory, full of misunderstandings and confusion for all concerned in them ; for she was not a person to whom such business matters came easily. She was always being cheated and overreached, and often thought herself cheated when it was she herself who was mistaken.

Her first unfriendly encounter with one of this much-abused class of persons is worth preserving because of its quaint conclusion. It happened as long ago as the spring of her brother's elopement, when her troubles with the proprietor of her Court magazine, Bull, of Holles Street, reached such a point that she was called before the Vice-Chancellor to testify against him.

The Vice-Chancellor, however, received her with scant courtesy, announcing that no one who made a business of writing fiction was competent to tell the truth about any question of mere fact.

The Vice-Chancellor's opinion excited at the time a good deal of amusement among her acquaintances, and was no doubt sufficiently exasperating to her ; for in this matter, at least, she seems to have had the right on her side. But there was, perhaps, a residuum of truth in his conclusion. She must always have been too eager, too interested, of too constructive as well as retentive a memory either to receive or to retain impressions untinctured by her own strong

individuality. Indeed, she never outgrew a certain heedlessness and picturesqueness of statement which made her always a very easy person to put in the wrong, as well as a very difficult one to deal with in matters of business.

To the end of her life she was subject to bursts of stormy temper, on what seemed to the onlooker sometimes very inadequate cause. But there was nothing mean or unworthy about these sudden outbursts. It was as if she was made on a somewhat larger plan from the rest of the world, as if unconsciously she moved with a somewhat wider step than her companions, till at last the growing difference between them had to be readjusted violently, often painfully, before they could walk together in peace again. And sometimes they never walked again together. But she never lost her facility for making new friends, and most of her old ones she kept on and on, through all the calms and storms of their relations, to the extreme end of her life.

I quote now from a notice which appeared in the *Athenaeum* after her death, written probably by one of the oldest of these old friends, Hayward :

"One fine quality she evinced in all her ways of thinking and acting and writing, an unaffected disdain of affectation. Nothing could be simpler or more direct, nothing more tender and noble than her ordinary conversation; but the iron had entered her soul, and every now and then there was a spice of mockery or scorn bitter as wormwood."

Her last published letter to Hayward belongs to the end of 1872 :

"FRAMPTON COURT, DORCHESTER,  
"December 28, 1872.

"ILLUSTRIOS AVOCAT,

"I will not delay answering about the quotation, though this is Saturday, and you will not have letters on Sunday!"

"There is no copy of Walter Scott's poetry in this well-furnished house! But the passage you quote is in 'The Bridal of Triermain,' in the description of the Joust or Tournament, where—

"‘Lanval, with the fairy lance  
And Dinadam with lively glance,  
And Launcelot, who looked askance  
Evermore on the Queen’—

distinguished themselves. I think the lines you want run thus :

"‘And still these lovers' fame survives  
For truth so constant shown ;  
There were two who loved their neighbours' wives,  
And one who loved his own,—

the one being Lord Caradoc, or Craddock. You will easily find the passage, in that brief, lovely, and under-valued poem, which describes how—

"‘All too well sad Guendolen  
Hath taught the faithlessness of men  
That child of hers should pity, when  
Their meed they undergo.’

Not that I have found men inconstant—but very much the reverse—perhaps kings and princes are an exception. While you are looking out the quotation, observe the lovely description of the girls who disarm Arthur and play with his armour. How pretty is the trying-on by one girl on her glossy little head of the helmet of that large warrior!

"‘Then screamed 'twixt laughter and surprise  
To feel its depth o'erwhelm her eyes.’

"It was read to me, first, in the unforgotten days which idiots and sensualists think could only be filled with commonplace flatteries and fooleries—but which held, for me, the best intellectual tutorship any young eager mind ever received.

"Like the old Brighton landlady who said, 'You live in the house, you know; but everything else is an extra;' I have always set the other sort of love down as 'an extra.' An extra, too, which may be bought too dear, as all extras are.

"Thanks for the little brochure of Lord Lansdowne. I read it over again the other day at Keir. It is far

the best notice that appeared, and page 7 the truest estimate of him and his value—so also at page 21. ‘He listened as well as he talked’ is perfect.

“I remember when first reading the notice, thinking the quotation at page 28 (from me) might mislead people; for, after all, my ‘wild appeals’ were not for help in any way, but justice about my children and reputation.

“He once asked me to let him buy the manuscript of a novel, and I refused, saying it was meant for assistance.

“Not that I should have been ashamed of his help; I would have been very glad if he had remembered me as he did Blank.

“I wonder it is not more done in this world of struggles.

“How curious was that incident the other day, of the fortune of Mrs. Brown going to the Queen for lack of heirs! And the poor old lady lived—I hear—in constant dread of being robbed, and of being known to be rich! My grandson, Richard, is getting on well in languages. He is hard at work on German, and I will give him your translation of ‘Faust’ to help him.

“We all stay in the country till his holidays are ended, and then I shall be in Chesterfield Street for a little while. I have been poorly almost the whole year past!

“Motley broke a blood-vessel some weeks since, but recovered; and is gone to Poltimore to welcome in the new year, 1873. Wishing you health and prosperity for that unseen interval of time, whose advent is ushered in for me by the Keir boys anxiously working me a kettle-holder,

“Believe me,

“Yours ever truly,

“C. CLIENT.

“Excuse scrawliness, I am so hurried. I feared to miss the post to-morrow, so wrote at once about the verses.”

Lord Lansdowne had died in 1863. Lady Stirling-Maxwell died in 1874, just as Mrs. Norton and her grandchildren were going to make their usual autumn visit at Keir.

But George Norton lived on, though after that forced companionship at the time of Fletcher's death his wife never saw him, and seldom spoke of him without the utmost bitterness and contempt. But nothing she felt towards him ever influenced her to an unkind action, even when she had it in her power to make him feel some small measure of the tyranny he had once inflicted on her. Whenever he was in town and wished to see his grandchildren while they were still under her direction, she was always ready to give him opportunity, sending them to him at his house in Wilton Place on Sunday mornings, when he would take them with him to church, or sometimes to walk.

He grew very bent and infirm in these later years, older-looking than his elder brother, though he kept his clear, ruddy colouring to the end. Some years before his death he gave up his police magistracy and retired on a pension, spending much of his time hereafter in the country, either on his estate in Yorkshire or with the Grantleys at Wonersh Park.

One finds so little good of him that it is pleasant to insert here the opinion of one of his fellow-magistrates, Mr. Ellison, who had been long associated with him on the Bench. This gentleman is quoted as warmly praising Mr. Norton's care and patience in the discharge of his duty, and the ability he had displayed as magistrate in meeting the difficulties of each case referred to him for decision with good temper and a desire to do justice in every sense, especially mentioning his anxiety for and sympathy with the poor.

It would be pleasant to believe that this interest and sympathy for the poor, mentioned more than once as characteristic of Mr. Norton, was the one little silver thread caught in the web of this unlovely character during those years of closest companionship with the generous, warm-hearted woman who had once, to use his own words, had all power over him.

He died at last at his brother's house, Wonersh Park, on March 20, 1875.

His body was taken to Yorkshire to be buried, beside his two sons. Lord Grantley himself followed his brother a little later in the same year, and was buried in the family vault at Wonersh. Not so his wife. Lady Grantley survived her husband long enough to announce her intention of resting anywhere after death except by his side. She had lived with the Nortons all her life, she is reported as saying, and that was enough. Nothing on earth could persuade her to be buried with them.

Mrs. Norton was in Italy with her son and granddaughter when she heard of her husband's death. She was human enough to express a very natural irritation that, having lived so long, he had not lived a little longer and made her Lady Grantley before he died.

His death was, none the less, a great shock to her. She came back instantly to England, and soon afterwards fell very ill, and for more than a year and a half was almost invalided in her room in Chesterfield Street.

But she kept her looks to the end, though people only meeting her at this later time were less impressed with her eyes than with her lovely mouth and the beauty of her teeth and voice.

"Yes, I shall be handsome, even when I am in my coffin," she said to some one who was admiring her in these later days. Yet she laughed at an artist whose sketch made her unduly youthful-looking, and called his pictures "Roses of Jericho." A rose of Jericho is a small shrub, the stiff branches of which, when withered, curl into an irregular circle, resembling a rose clumsily carved in wood; but which, when put in water, expands and softens into life again. The poem "The Rose of Jericho," which is sometimes included among Mrs. Norton's own writings, is really not by her at all, but is a translation of a German fable

made long before by her mother, Mrs. Sheridan, and published at last by the daughter in 1872.

Perhaps the most satisfactory of her many likenesses is the marble bust now at Frampton Court, done by her brother-in-law, Lord Gifford, while she was still at the height of her beauty. The terra-cotta bust by Williamson, now in the possession of the National Portrait Gallery, is interesting because it was completed after very few sittings—the last summer of her life—during the short period of her marriage with her old friend, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, whose companion bust, made at the same time by the same sculptor, is also the property of the National Portrait Gallery.

She was married in her own little drawing-room in Chesterfield Street, in the spring of 1877. Her granddaughter speaks of the brief period that followed as a time of great peace and happiness for them all. The long struggle of her life was at last ended. The devoted friend of so many years was her husband, with the right, as well as the power and will, to protect her against all further buffets of fortune. Her health, too, was better than it had been for years. Three months after her marriage, however, on the eve of her departure, with her husband and granddaughter, to Keir, where they were all going to spend the rest of the summer, she was taken suddenly ill, and died, after a few days of acute suffering, on June 15, 1877. Her body was removed to Scotland, and buried in the family vault at Keir, her husband and her two grandchildren being the chief mourners—for Brinsley, Lord Grantley, was too ill to leave Italy even to attend his mother's funeral. His death, in fact, followed hers within a very few days. Nor did her husband, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, survive her many months.

He died of fever at Venice, on his way home from Capri, where he had gone to conduct his step-daughter to her widowed mother. If he had lived, perhaps



MRS. NORTON.



some effort would have been made to give Mrs. Norton's literary remains at least the permanence of a uniform edition. As it is, as I have already said, most of her writings, both prose and poetry, are nearly out of print. And for more than a generation the history of her life has been left in the hands of persons who only cared to use its events so far as these supply material for that quasi-historical, wholly gossiping kind of reading-matter which is always fairly popular with a large class of readers.

The best proof I can bring that all these earlier biographies are either misleading or inadequate, or both, lies in the foregoing pages, in which I have made no attempt to disguise Mrs. Norton's faults or magnify her virtues, or to defend her beyond the point when defence becomes special pleading.

Nevertheless, I believe that no one can read these pages about her without being convinced that she has a defence which ought to protect her henceforth from the assaults of literary scandal-mongers, and that she has a claim for more serious consideration, both as a woman and as a writer, than has ever yet been accorded her.

My excuse for taking up this defence and trying to advance this claim is the peculiar interest which I have always felt for everything even remotely connected with her history, an interest which must in the course of time have resulted in a somewhat fuller knowledge than is general even among her closest admirers, whose number indeed, even now, I believe to be not inconsiderable, and sure to increase as the real woman, the true measure of her nobly gifted though imperfect character, becomes more widely and more fairly known.



## LIST OF MRS. NORTON'S WRITINGS

- The Sorrows of Rosalie and Other Poems (John Ebers & Co. 1829).  
The Undying One and Other Poems (H. Colburn & R. Bentley. 1830).  
Poems and Sketches in *The Court Magazine* and *The Belle Assemblée* for 1832-34 (J. Bull, of Holles Street).  
Poems in the *English Annual* for 1834-35.  
The Wife, and Woman's Reward. Two prose tales (Saunders & Otley. 1835).  
Poems appearing in *The Keepsake* for 1836.  
A Voice from the Factories. A poem (John Murray. 1836).  
Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of Custody of Infants considered. A prose pamphlet printed for private circulation by Ridgway. 1837.  
A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor, by Pearse Stevenson (a *nom-de-plume*). Printed for distribution among members of Parliament by J. Ridgway. Not published. 1839.  
The Dream and Other Poems (Henry Colburn. 1840).  
The Child of the Islands. A Poem (Chapman & Hall. 1845).  
Fisher's Drawing-Room Scrap-Book. Poems (1846-48).  
Aunt Carry's Ballads for Children (1847).  
Letters to the Mob. Published first in *The Morning Chronicle*: collected 1848.  
Stuart of Dunleath. A Novel (1851).  
English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century. Printed for private circulation (1854).  
A Letter to the Queen on Lord Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill (Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans. 1855).  
Verses on Burns. Centenary Festival, 1859.  
The Lady of La Garaye. A Poem (Macmillan & Co. 1862).  
Lost and Saved. A Novel (Hurst & Blackett. 1863. Rights purchased by Macmillan).  
Poems and Sketches in *Macmillan's Magazine* (1861-75).  
Old Sir Douglas. A Serial.

## LIST OF MRS. NORTON'S SONGS

The Land I Love : " Fair though the land may be."

The Lonely Harp : " Hush, I am listening."

The Love of Helen Douglas.

The Madman's Lament.

Marquita.

Let Lovers Talk.

The Midshipman : " Peace be around thy distant grave."

The Missionary's Grave : " Oh, far in the east."

The Morning Star : " Our ship held her course."

The Mother's Lament : " Oh, where shall I wander ?

" Thy Name was once the Magic Spell."

No More Sea : " Like the wild, ceaseless motion of the deep  
" None remember thee."

Not Lost but Gone before.

The Officer's Funeral.

" Oh Distant Stars whose Tranquil Light."

" Oh, Happy the Life we Gipsies lead."

" Oh, take me back to Switzerland."

The Path across the Seas : " In life's delightful morn."

Patrick, macushla : " Come, Patrick, cheer up."

Pray for those at Sea.

" Since Precious Things are Purchased Dear."

The Soldier's Life : " Dauntless and glad."

" Take thy Lute, oh Gentle Friend."

Smiles of the Past : " In life's early dawning."

The Song of the Fairies : " Sleep, mortal, sleep."

Song of the New Year : " Hark ! the old year is flown."

" Sorrowful Trees, Cypress and Yew."

The Talisman : " Oh belovèd, now we are parted."

To-morrow : " Bright smiling eyes."

The Indian Exile : " An exile in the Indian land  
                            Upon his pillow dreaming lay."

" Love not, love not—the thing you love may die."

"We are the wandering breezes."

"We have been friends together, shall a harsh word part us now?"

Woman's Truth : "Doubt me not, soldier."

"Forget me not, though others fairer."

The Birdie's Song : "As I came o'er the distant hills I heard a wee  
birdie sing."

Come what may : "Since thy dear smile was lost."

"By Mossy Bank in Forest Wildwood."

King Frederick's Camp.

The Cossack's War Song.

The Faithful Lover: composed for and sung by Miss Christine  
Nilsson.

Bingen on the Rhine : "A soldier of the legion."

But Thou : "Delia, some few short years ago."

The Fairy Bells : I dreamt, 'Twas but a dream."

"I have left my quiet home."

Absalom.

A Health to the Outward Bound.

The Blind Man's Bride : "Oh, blind I am and helpless."

"Oh, slumber now, my darling."

"Fade, watch-lights, fade."

"Hopeless I've watched thee."

My Arab steed : "My beautiful, my beautiful."

The King of Denmark's Ride.

Juanita : "Soft o'er the fountain."



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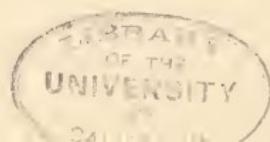
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